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r. LLOYD GEORGE

E. T. RAYMOND

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A BIOGRAPHY

by

E. T. RAYMOND

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Illustrated

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CHAPTER I

THE Coalition Mind, so eminently illustrated in the subject of this study, is no new thing. Towards the close of the third century of the Christian era the son of a Dalmatian slave, profiting no less by the lack of commanding talent in his competitors than by his own great abilities, attained supreme power in the Roman world, effected a union of parties, skilfully converted actual and possible rivals into obedient lieutenants, contrived an elaborate bureaucratic system, and became in effect the founder of a new Empire.

'As the reign of Diocletian,' remarks Gibbon, 'was more illustrious than that of any of his predecessors, so was his birth more abject and obscure. The strong claims of merit and of violence had frequently superseded the ideal prerogatives of nobility; but a distinct line of separation was hitherto preserved between the free and the servile part of mankind.'

The historian of the British Empire, equally impressed with a sense of significant novelty in the contrast between the unnotable origin and the illustrious achievement of the Right Honourable David Lloyd George, may be tempted to one of those fanciful parallels which are the besetting weakness of the historical imagination. The task would be neither more difficult nor more futile than many actually attempted. It could be shown that the British statesman, like the Roman, was helped by the failure of a predecessor whose qualities were 'rather of the contemplative than the active kind.' It could be argued that both showed 'dexterity and application in business; a judicious mixture of mildness and rigour; steadiness to pursue ends; flexibility to vary means,' a disposition, moreover, never to employ force, when a purpose could be effected by policy. It could be maintained that each 'ensured his success by every means that prudence could suggest, and displayed with ostentation the consequences of his victory.' Stress might be laid on the dexterity with which both co-ordinated apparently obdurate and discordant elements, so that the 'singular happiness' of their administrations could (for a time at least) be 'compared to a chorus of music whose harmony was regulated and maintained by the skilful hand of the first artist.' The successor of Gibbon might, indeed, lack the fortune to discover in any British Field-Marshal the analogue of that 'faithful soldier' employed by Diocletian, who was 'content to ascribe his own victories to the wise counsels and auspicious influence of his benefactor.' But while noting how the Roman Senate was deprived of its 'small remains of power and consideration' he would hardly ignore the coincidence of a rapid if accidental decline in the prestige and authority of the House of Commons during the period of Mr. George's ascendancy. Observing that both the Dalmatian and the Welshman made ostentation one principle of rule, and division another, and that both 'multiplied the wheels of government,' he might show that in each case the system involved a 'very material disadvantage'—that is to say, 'a more expensive establishment and consequently an increase of taxes,' which became in a brief space an 'intolerable and increasing grievance.'

So far the parallel is little more strained than most things in this vain kind. Nor is it impossible that time may further fortify it. In the full blaze of his glory Diocletian commanded the respect of the philosophic and the astonishment of the vulgar by a voluntary retirement. The modern statesman has more than once hinted that he, also, may some day withdraw to await, in rural seclusion, the day when he is laid, in accordance with wishes he has sometimes expressed, in a simple tomb under the shadow of his own mountains.* Antique record leaves it uncertain whether Diocletian's interest in the cabbage ante-dated his removal to Valona. Mr. George, in the plenitude of his powers, has already revealed an interest, rare in urban mankind, in the still humbler mangel-wurzel.

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* Mr. A. G. Gardiner ('Pillars of Society') relates that on the day of the memorial service to the Marquess of Ripon a companion laughingly remarked to Mr. George, 'When you die we'll give you a funeral like that.' 'No, you won't,' was the swift, almost passionate reply. 'When I die you will lay me in the shadow of the mountains.'

It is only when we approach the matter of birth that the parallel fails. Mr. George's extraction might be held 'obscure,' though only in a sense embracing all but a tiny minority of his fellow-citizens. In no sense could it be deemed 'abject,' still less 'servile.' It was not even in the genuine sense poor. In speaking of himself as a 'cottage-bred man' and a 'child of the people,' Mr. George has contributed to a popular misunderstanding. By a tragic but common accident he spent his early years in close contact with the true poor. But his pedigree and family traditions, and even his upbringing, were authentically middle-class, and his own plans and ideas, from the first awakening of ambition, were those appropriate to the order which of all others offers the largest freedom and widest choice of self-development.

Yet in some sense Mr. George's rise to supreme power does in truth present a significance such as Gibbon finds in the contrast between Diocletian's origin and destiny. It marks the end of a definite order of things. It does not necessarily herald the triumph of 'democracy.' It does, with almost ritual emphasis, break the continuity of 'gentlemanocracy.' The true distinction between Mr. Lloyd George and his predecessors has relation neither to birth nor to early poverty. It is simply a difference in training and tradition. Before him—with the exception of Disraeli—every British Prime Minister possessed the outlook of the English upper classes. When Mr. George went to 10 Downing Street in the last month of 1916 that dreary threshold was passed for the first time by an official tenant who had missed, or escaped, the varnish of English higher culture. Of his predecessors some might, by chance, have lacked a public school or university education. But they were still gentlemen, because they had either family, or money, or both. Those, on the other hand, who possessed neither money nor coat armour were gentlemen by virtue of their passage through one of the national factories for the manufacture of gentlemen. But David Lloyd George, belonging to no family, possessing no money, was also deprived of what is called 'formal education.' It was indeed no ill-informed or ill-bred man who mused, perhaps in the very chair on which Pitt used to sit astride in the eager perusal of despatches, on problems vaster and more desperate than even Pitt had to revolve. Thirty years in the practice of politics and of a learned profession had given him a social ease and flexibility adequate to all the probable demands of his station. A strong memory, a rapid perception, wide if desultory reading, constant converse with the most considerable minds of his time had supplied the defects (easily exaggerated) of his schooling. It would be ridiculous to suppose that the varied experiences of a life spent in close contact with every kind of superiority could have left a singularly adaptable nature more deficient in the social arts and graces than a professor or a country clergyman. It would be absurd to suggest that the statesman of fifty-three was in general culture the inferior of every dull squire who happened to have taken a pass degree thirty years before. But it would be equally uncritical to ignore the fact that the acquirements of maturity are held on a different tenure from the lessons unconsciously absorbed in youth. For good and ill Mr. George was distinguished in mind and spirit, in instincts and ideals, materially and indeed incalculably, from all his predecessors, and not least from those who, so far as concerned extraction, belonged as little as himself to the gentlemanly caste.

It is, indeed, a fact of prodigious importance that at a capital crisis in British history the supreme power of direction fell into the hands of a statesman so little imbued with what is called the public school spirit. The case was exaggerated by Mr. George's Welsh birth; in England the public school spirit extends far beyond the public schools. That spirit is eminently aristocratic, and if for over two hundred years the aristocratic temper of British political institutions had been maintained through much superficial change it was chiefly because almost every middle-class statesman of the first rank had been touched, through the universities and public schools, with the tone and tradition of aristocracy. Such tradition was, indeed, necessary to the curious conspiracy called Cabinet Government.

Absolutism, whether regal or democratic, works through a chain of subordinates who are essentially servants. Under Cabinet Government subordinates are not servants, but colleagues who for convenience acknowledge a limited primacy on the part of one of their number. The system can be maintained only on the public school ideas of 'cricket,' team work, a common social outlook, a common aim and pride, the subordination of individual interests to those of a side, the vulgarity of personal display, the treachery (beyond a point) of personal ambition. The whole thing is a conspiracy rather than a Government, and therefore the honour and the discipline of Cabinet rule are rather those of a pirate craft than of a King's ship; loyalty is modified by round robins, and the black spot is sometimes tendered. But it is nevertheless strongly felt that the interest of the ship comes first, and further that there is a certain duty to other pirate crews; they may be fought, but they must never be betrayed to Execution Dock. A politician, in short, may intrigue against another politician in the same crew; he may even change crews and fight his former comrades; but he must be loyal to the ship while he is in it, and he must never go seriously against the general interest of all politicians.

Even in his subordinate days Mr. George found some difficulty in accommodating his remarkable talents and character to this conception. He could seldom resist the temptation of organising movements, whether in the forecastle or the cuddy, inimical to the peace of the skipper, and sometimes he had committed the final enormity of appealing in a way unrecognised by pirate law and sentiment to the common enemy and victim of all political parties, the public. His relation to the orthodox politician was rather that of the individualist trader, in the break-up of mediævalism, to the collectivist guildsman. With his advent to full power the Cabinet system went altogether. Government at once became scarcely less personal than in Stuart days. Under other names and in other forms the Whitehall of another age returned with startling abruptness. The Cabinet's place was taken by what our ancestors would have called a Cabal—a body owing its existence purely to the Prime

Minister's fancy and subservient to him as no Cabinet was subservient to the most imperious Prime Minister between Walpole and Mr. Asquith. The House of Commons ceased to have much importance beyond that of a convenient theatre for the more impressive kind of Ministerial declaration. Ministers felt no occasion to trouble about its confidence ; the necessary thing was to retain, by desert or trick, that of the Prime Minister. Unknown men exercised the most despotic powers on the simple authority of Mr. George's 'Go and get busy.' On the other hand, experienced statesmen found themselves liable to interference in those matters which had always been considered within the sole discretion of a departmental chief. In a week the whole face of English political life was changed. It was found that whispers at 10 Downing Street might be more effective than thunders from the back benches. Only the more stupid politicians persevered in the dull routine of speech and question; astute generals quickly discerned that to get things done it was better not to address the War Office; foreign diplomatists of perception at once realised that the real Foreign Minister slept in Mr. George's bed and sat at Mr. George's breakfast-table; there was hardly a coal-heaver who did not soon divine that the one man to reach was not the disconsolate President of the Board of Trade, or the dummy Minister of Labour, but the head of the Government.

Mr. George, indeed, has never been a Prime Minister in the old sense. His system has revealed some virtues and many defects; but its vigour and its caprice, its prompt decisions and its unashamed reversals of policy, its audacities of conception and its panicky abandonments have nothing in common with the virtues or defects of Parliamentarism. The source of his power is personal; the exercise of it is personal. The policy of his Government has been simply the expression of his varying inspirations and prejudices, modified by tactical necessity. It has never been the policy of a Government of the older type, that of a number of men, some clever, some stupid, some rash, some cautious, but all restrained by a mass of tradition, convention, and precedent, constitutional, social, and spiritual. Mr. George has done many things, and left undone many more, through fear of losing popular favour or antagonising individuals likely to be useful to him. But he has never hesitated to do a thing because it has never been done, or because (as the phrase goes) it is 'not done.'

This disposition has, no doubt, its roots in character, and would doubtless have been manifested in some degree, whatever the statesman's antecedents. But the accident of temperament would have been more gently felt, the breach in the continuity of things political would have been less abrupt, but for two facts. Mr. George was born and bred a Welshman, that is a man outside the English tradition. The circumstances of his life prevented his assimilating that tradition, and he arrived at supreme place singularly unaffected by the spirit which, for good or ill, has informed almost every prominent British statesman since the old English Kingship became the modern 'Crown.'

The most brilliant and picturesque Welshman since Glendower was born on English soil. There still remains, in a dingy suburb of Manchester, the little two-storied house, built flush to the mean street, where, on January 17, 1863, a 'sturdy healthy little fellow, stronger and much more lively than his sister,' and blessed with a wonderful head of 'fine curly hair,'* wailed his first comments on a not too promising world. A melancholy train of circumstances explains this incongruity of the appearance, in surroundings so alien, and so lacking in amenity, of one destined to add in such large measure to the prestige of his race. William George, the father of the future Prime Minister, was a man of considerable talent and no mean culture, but lacking in exactly those qualities of decision, energy, appetite for action with which his elder son has proved so richly endowed. He seems to have been a born dilettante. Sprung from a substantial yeoman family long settled in Pembrokeshire—the Georges are supposed to owe their name, most rare in Wales, to a Flemish mercenary in the train of Henry Tudor*—he early conceived a strong distaste for the life of the land. He could not live, he said, with his nose dug into the soil. At the same time his mind was of that soft texture that rebels against the effort of concentration necessary to master any of the learned professions. He refused the opportunity to become a doctor, and finally drifted into teaching, in the fallacious hope that it would at once afford a satisfactory career and indulge his passion for that kind of reading which appeals rather to the bookworm than to the purposeful student. The choice proved in every way disappointing. William George taught in London and Liverpool; he tried unsuccessfully to establish himself as a private schoolmaster in Haverfordwest; at length he was driven to accept the pure drudgery of a primary school at Pwlheli, in Carnarvonshire.

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* His father's description, quoted by Mr. Hugh Edwards, M.P., 'D. Lloyd George.'

Here the clever but unpractical scholar—only a man of exceptional gifts could have attracted the notice of a highly intellectual divine like Dr. James Martineau, and only an unpractical man could have failed to make effective use of such endowments—married Miss Elizabeth Lloyd, of Llanystumdwy. The need of improving his circumstances impelled a move shortly afterwards to Newchurch, in Lancashire, but the venture turned out unfortunately. The Lancashire smoke distressed Mr. George's lungs; the Lancashire temperament jarred on his haughtily sensitive spirit. The school managers were for the most part 'rude mechanicals' with ideas of their own and a direct way of expressing them, and William George's disposition was such that (to quote his own words) he would 'rather be the master of workpeople than their servant.' So the odyssey of disdainful impracticability had to be resumed. At last, ill and despairing, Mr. George determined to return to the life of the land which he had contemned.

It was while he was fulfilling his last scholastic engagement, the temporary charge of a school at Manchester, that the event occurred which has preserved his misfortunes from the oblivion common to thousands of such obscure tragedies. No. 5 New York Place, where David Lloyd George was born, was only the shelter of the moment, and the child, named after his grandfather and his mother, was but a very few months old when he left the filth and smoke of Lancashire for the pure air of Wales. William George bought the lease of a small holding near Haverfordwest, and settled down to the life of a small farmer. In June, 1864, a chill caught in gardening on a damp day rapidly developed into pneumonia, and, when his little son was still under eighteen months of age, William George died in his forty-fourth year.

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* Mr. Hugh Edwards, M.P., 'D. Lloyd George.'

A few days after the funeral Mrs. George gave birth to a posthumous son, on whom the name of the father was bestowed. To this child also was assigned a due part in the family epic. Gentle and unselfish, William George was marked from the first to be his brother's understudy. Unconsciously, in the home and at school, he rehearsed the part he was to play in maturity. This David, who was later to stand in need of a fitting Jonathan, found one without looking beyond his family circle.

In Wales, as in Ireland, ancestors are not the monopoly of the rich, and Mrs. William George's possessions in this respect would have been worth much to an English upstart. She could number among her forefathers a legendary knight and an indubitable astronomer. But in the middle nineteenth century the glories of the family were a little faded, and the only relative to whom the widow could look for succour was her bachelor brother, Richard Lloyd, the shoemaker of Llanystumdwy. It is not easy now to picture the sort of man and tradesman Richard Lloyd was. On his business side he must not be confused with the yellow and melancholy being who now gains a precarious livelihood by doing odd repairs in an English hamlet. He made boots and did not merely botch them; in England, and in Wales even more, there was still room for the handicraftsman. Richard Lloyd was no mere cobbler, but a master shoemaker, generally employing one or two journeymen; he lived in proud if rough independence; he could call his soul, as well as his shop, his own. Poor he was, but firmly rooted; his was not the kind of poverty that can at any moment be converted, on the will of another, into destitution. His customers wanted his work and could not well go elsewhere, and he was under no necessity to lie or flatter lest 'the stores' should tempt them. He could, and did, order his spiritual and intellectual life as he saw fit, and was one of the few people who, in what his nephew has called 'the blackest Tory parish in the land,' could afford to stand forth as a consistent and unabashed Radical. Between leather and scepticism there was long thought to be some mystical relation; but Richard Lloyd was remarkable even in rural Wales for the fervour of his religious emotions and the rigidity of his religious principles. He belonged to a small sect, an offshoot from the Baptists, called the Disciples of Christ. The distinguishing tenet of this body was its condemnation of a paid Ministry as unscriptural, and Richard Lloyd, like his father before him, was one of its most valued preachers. On indifferent matters he tended to a certain liberality, and had little in common with those unlettered saints who hold secular learning to be superfluous and even undesirable. His naturally gentle disposition softened the asperity of the Calvinistic temper, and his social relations with professors of other creeds were generally correct if not cordial. But when any attack was made on his faith, or on the political creed which for him represented that faith in its temporal aspect, every fibre of his being stiffened in resistance; and for many years his shop was the trysting-place of all that withstood what were to him the twin powers of evil, the Established Church and the Tory Party.

A stalwart and stately soul had an appropriately impressive lodgment. In his extreme age, with his long forked whiskers of snowy white, Richard Lloyd was still a man to challenge a second glance. But, with the severest of his life's battles left far behind, his features had softened into comparative ordinariness. In his middle years his face, lined with care, overcast by habitual melancholy, stern with the slow anger of one who sees in every human injustice an affront to the Almighty, was scarcely less arresting than that of some gaunt saint of Spagnoletto or El Greco. Whatever else may be said of it, the Welsh Nonconformity of the nineteenth century was a genuinely popular religion, with the dignity always attaching to a faith held fervently by the common people, and this dignity could hardly have been better symbolised than in the figure, almost majestic in its apostolic combination of poverty and saintliness, of this village shoemaker.

Such was the second father of David Lloyd George. The part he had assumed as a matter of course on the news of William George's death. He at once sought his sister, offered her a home, arranged for the realisation of her effects. The house and furniture were sold, to the anger of the children, who resented the auction as an outrage, and, child-like, resorted to little stratagems to prevent certain cherished articles being taken away. These facts were recalled, in middle life, by Mr. George himself. As at the time of his father's death he was but little over eighteen months old, the circumstance indicates a precocity and strength of memory that would be almost incredible, were independent proof not forthcoming.*

Llanystumdwy, the new home of 'David Lloyd'—for so he was to be known for many years to come—lies inland on the River Dwyfawr, about two miles from the sea at Criccieth. The most casual study of the village, physically and politically considered, suffices to a due realisation of its influence on the future statesman. Behind it rise the mountains which have served in so many picturesque perorations. Between them and the sea are capital shooting and fishing, then, as now, strictly preserved. To the most unreflective stranger there comes always in such places a specially strong sense of the contrast between the wild freedom of nature and the restrictions imposed by law. A thoughtful native, impressed by the liberty and repressed by the restrictions, may be assumed to be much more powerfully affected. To a vivid, spirited lad with some natural taste for small poaching and extensive hedge-breaking—and such, it is to be lamented, was 'David Lloyd's' early reputation—it was natural enough that the silhouette of the game-keeper should stand forth with sinister distinctness against the background of the everlasting hills.

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* Several witnesses agree that Mr. George, when visiting his old home in middle life, pointed out several alterations made since his childhood. In the interval he had never seen the house.

And if this aspect of squire-rule suggested precocious speculations of emphatic tendency, still more positive was the effect of another. At his uncle's shop he heard countless stories of the terrorism exercised over tenants and cottagers at Parliamentary elections. He was five years old when, after the election of 1868, numbers of men were turned out of their holdings because they had dared to vote against the wishes of their landlords. The memory of these dread things was burned in by countless repetitions; their effect was heightened by the dramatic instincts of men speaking a language singularly suited to emotional expression; and it is small wonder that the lad grew up to think of landlords as almost a separate species, as men of prey, a race unjust, implacable, uncompassionate, with desires 'bloody, greedy, starved, and ravenous.' Even their religion was an offence. To the lad brought up in the straitest sect of the Baptists, the Parish Church became the symbol, not alone of a noxious superstition, but of a domination detested as alien and resented as practically oppressive. For the rest the shoemaker's meagre table, often meatless—the chief luxury 'half an egg on Sundays'*—imparted an indelible impression of the concrete facts of poverty.

Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that David Lloyd's life was generally sombre, or that it was overshadowed by any painful sense of humiliation. Some of its privations were due to the situation and the period rather than to the worldly circumstances of the household; fresh meat was something of a rarity in quite well-to-do country households before the days of cold storage, and the art of dividing a soft-boiled egg was perfectly understood by middle-class mothers when eggs could be bought for twenty-two or twenty-four to the shilling. The Lloyds, moreover, were not a specially humble family; they enjoyed, on many grounds,—material, moral, and intellectual—a sort of primacy in the village. The glimpses we have of the lad's life suggest a 'happy human boy.' The good uncle knew how to be severe; his religion forebade much gaiety; and, as in most Puritan households, there was a tendency to expect and promote an unnatural spiritual precocity; David Lloyd seems to have learned to preach almost as soon as to manage a hoop. But the ill effects which might have been produced on a child of another temperament were happily wanting. Even as a lad Mr. George seems to have been able to divide his being into water-tight compartments. There was the small Calvinistic chapel-goer, thinking how fine it would be to be a preacher some day and make people tremble. There was the fiery little politician, chiefly a rebel, but already with vague ideas of 'doing good.' There was the scholar, never applying specially, but always quick and competent. There was the wanderer in woods and raider of orchards. There was the devourer of every book that happened to pass his uncle's censorship. Each of these was a separate being. The uncle knew nothing until much later of the nephew's eager interest in light literature. The boy who got good conduct marks at school was a different being among the chosen companions of his small naughtinesses, and few, again, of these comrades understood the deeper things which even then were simmering in his active brain.

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* The fact was stated by Mr. Lloyd George in a speech made in 1898.

Those who think of education in terms of expense and complication may smile when Mr. Lloyd George insists that he sat at the feet of a 'great schoolmaster.' Those who remember how thorough were some of the old Voluntary schools in what they did profess to teach, and how conscientious were many of the masters, will not be disposed to deny David Evans's title to that tribute. He knew a good deal, and could teach all he knew. Under him the lad acquired and (more important) digested, a considerable stock of information. Curiously enough, arithmetic was his strong subject;

he acquired great skill in the working of long practice sums, and was never known to make any mistake as between ninepence and fourpence. He acquired much arcana of geography, and was reputed unequalled in his knowledge of 'principal towns' and 'chief products.'* He gained also an amazing acquaintance with the Scriptures, and especially with those Old Testament stories which for him supplied much of the excitement other boys find in detective tales. General literature he assimilated in the manner peculiar to him in later life; reading rapidly, and without apparent system, he managed to possess himself of the substance of any work, frivolous or learned, and what he had once noted he never forgot. His early habit of carrying a bundle of books is said to have given him that forward tilt of the head which has persisted through the years.†

Ten years of concentration on a restricted range of subjects, supplemented by private incursions into the English classics, much hearing of sermons, and much listening to political arguments at the village smithy and his uncle's shop, made David Lloyd at fourteen a tolerably well-informed youth. He might have a most vague notion of the Roman equestrian order, but he knew a great deal about the Welsh squirearchy. He could argue, though he might never have heard of inductive ratiocination. He could speak and write with force and eloquence, though he had listened to no learned lectures on rhetoric. If he knew nothing about the world, he knew much about certain realities of life. Jowett could have taught him, no doubt, in how many ways polite learning and good manners would help him to climb high or crawl comfortably. But Jowett's best political economist might have learned something from him on many subjects, notably the great subject of money. David Lloyd knew all about its dreadful importance, and much about its pitiful impotence. He could see what difference a few miserable pieces of silver may make, in dignity and health, to the poor; ten or twenty pounds a year sufficed, for example, to place his uncle (not to mention his uncle's wards) distinctly above the commoner sort of Llanystumdwy. On the other hand, he had his opportunities of noting how gold by the wagon-load fails to gild the folly of the fool or ennoble the outlook of the natural vulgarian. His uncle, the shoemaker, beset with the most sordid material cares, yet held his soul in high tranquillity, could preach in two languages, could discuss affairs with knowledge and authority, was ever ready to play his part as leader and counsellor in all that region. His mother, compelled to every painful economy, revealed daily some new talent or dignity. But much money, much teaching and feeding, had not saved some local squire from darkness of soul and stuttering bewilderment of brain, and all the gowns of Bond Street could not hide the flimsiness of his womankind.

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* Yet, in 1919, he seemed to think it remarkable that anybody had ever heard of Teschen.

† Mr. Hugh Edwards, M.P., 'D. Lloyd George.'

In case, however, the youth might be too much impressed by such facts, over-inclined to think of man as man, and to ignore the importance of social demarcations, there was a corrective to hand. David Lloyd did not merely observe society from below. He had also some little notion of its aspect from above. He and his brother, it would seem, enjoyed a special consideration as being the only village boys who wore knickerbockers; the rest of the school affected shapeless garments of the trouser kind. David and William, on the ground of their Glengarry caps and their knickerbockers—that kind, a careful biographer* notes, which are secured at the knee by elastic—were distinguished from the genuinely 'common' children. The effects of this discovery on the future Prime Minister were no doubt various. One may have been to foster a splendidly solemn ambition to do credit to his uniform—to prove worthy of the Knickerbocker order. Another may have been (one hopes it was not) to tempt the lad to pride and vainglory. But it is within reasonable conjecture that the most enduring result on a bright and humorous boy was to induce a lasting conviction that in a world of fools it is folly to be over-wise. They will do best who, while keeping their own minds free, make use of folly by indulging it; they must remember that, if knickerbockers command respect, it is just as well to take knickerbockers a little seriously. In his irresponsible days as a politician Mr. Lloyd George was quite out of the larger scheme of knickerbocker things, and could afford to indulge his scorn of them. But as time went on, and he began to form a part of the world which thinks much of knickerbocker distinctions, there was a change. His personal attitude remained that of a slightly scornful philosopher. But as a practical man of affairs he showed himself more than usually alive to the value of elastic honours as a medium of political exchange.

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* Mr. Hugh Edwards, M.P., 'D. Lloyd George.'

In fine, most of the puzzling complexities of Mr. Lloyd George's character—and not least that strange mingling of high impulse with petty calculation—can be explained by reference to the reactions of Llanystumdwy on a mind at once shrewd and generous, impressible and stubborn, given almost equally to opportunism and to fixed idea. The faith in money, the disregard of money; the abiding perception of human reality, the cynical understanding of human weakness; the sure sense of how to touch the hero in the commonest man, the not less certain divination of the right word to address on occasion to the greatest common meanness of humanity; the pity for the poor, the distrust of the poor; the cloudy 'social reform,' the clear-cut, almost tradesman-like individualism—all these contradictions have their origin in those far-off days when David Lloyd, with his middle-class pride, his middle-class ambition, his narrow material circumstances, his boundless intellectual curiosity, gathered from his own observations and inspirations more about the greatness and littleness of man than any professional psychologist could have taught him.

'A Welshman,' said Mr. George once, 'takes to politics as a duck to the water.' It was certainly so in his case. At five he had carried a flag in a Radical election procession; at six he had listened to the tales of men being dismissed for 'voting yellow'; at ten he was a participant in the village smithy debates, his 'first parliament'; and long before he left school he had given an example of his precocious talents as a leader of opposition. A sectarian question was concerned. The village school was supported by Church funds and under Church management; but, except for some half-dozen, all the boys were the sons of Nonconformists. It seemed to the management the most natural thing in the world that the Church creed and catechism should be taught in a Church school. To the Nonconformist parents, on the other hand, such instruction savoured of tyranny and blasphemy. Especially indignant was Richard Lloyd, to whom infant baptism was a profane mockery, that his nephews, who had of course never been christened, should be expected to affirm that their names had been bestowed on them by god-parents who did not exist at a ceremony which had never taken place. It was a lie, in his view, and a blasphemous lie.

Inflamed by the uncle's eloquence, David Lloyd planned a strike for the next creed and catechism day. He bound his school-fellows in a solemn league and covenant not, under any extremity of persecution, to utter the loathed formulas. The affair went off in strict accordance with plan, to the distress of the head-master, and the indignation of the squire and parson, until the gentle William George, through fear or compassion for his old teacher, gave way. With this submission the game was up; it was general surrender and *sauve qui peut.* David Lloyd alone remained obdurate, and was punished; the pains and penalties he passed on, with incredible interest, to his meeker brother, and he had the further satisfaction, first of receiving the praises of his uncle, and secondly of finding that his protest had decided the managers not to affront so decisively the susceptibilities of Nonconformity.*

So early was displayed that fierce resentment of the pretensions of the Established Church which coloured Mr. Lloyd George's political youth, and determined the manner of his entry into the House of Commons. His other passion, a hatred of landlordism, was no doubt nourished by his boyish collisions with keepers and other agents of the dominant caste, perhaps by physical attentions from some angry squire in person. For 'that David Lloyd'—with such tinge of disparagement farmers and land-owners generally referred to him—had the character of a desperate hedge-breaker and depredator, and his own confessions suggest that it was not unmerited. 'The land round our village,' he once said in public, 'was strictly preserved, but that did not prevent us having our full share of nature's bounty in the form of apples and nuts.' But the landlords, who could hardly be expected to share these liberal views, sometimes took fell vengeance. 'A boy once killed a hare, and as a result he had to be sent away by his widowed mother from the farm she occupied; failing that, she was told she would be turned out of her home.'

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* The story is told in great detail both by Mr. Hugh Edwards and Mr. H. Duparcq.

Hard is the fate of the obscure oppressors of the famous. Their point of view is never given. We all know what Shakespeare thought of Sir Thomas Lucy. Nobody knows or cares what Sir Thomas might have to say about Shakespeare. Yet probably he had, whether according to the Decalogue or the law of England, an excellent case, of which he was too good-natured to take full advantage; and something, no doubt, might also be said on behalf of the despots of Llanystumdwy. It is annoying to have hares killed. It is inconvenient to have fences broken. And what hasty landlord is to guess that a curly-haired, wide-eyed, large-headed, handsome imp in Glengarry and elastic knickerbockers, whom he cuffs for trespassing, will some day be a powerful Minister, with a will and a memory?

CHAPTER II

SCHOLARSHIPS and exhibitions are seldom useful to those who most need them. They save the pockets of people who might afford the full cost of a higher education for their children. To the really poor they are pure mockery, and the class just above the really poor is usually little better placed. In the case of David Lloyd public school and university were out of the question, since the difference between the most valuable scholarship and the actual cost of maintenance was far beyond the means of Richard Lloyd. Whatever calling the boy might adopt, he must dispense with any better foundation of general culture than the village school could afford, or his private efforts supply. To-day, with all the millions spent on education, the position of a bright lad in his special circumstances would be scarcely less hopeless.

It is decisive evidence of the strength of middle-class traditions in the Lloyd and George families, however humble their actual circumstances, that there was never any idea of disposing of the youth in some manual trade. Both his mother and his uncle were determined that he should take his proper rank among the black-coats. But as what?

The boy's natural bent was, at fourteen or so, towards preaching. It is not necessary to infer a strong spiritual bias. The truth is rather that to a poor and gifted Welsh youth of his time the pulpit offered attractions an Englishman finds it hard to understand. It promised little money, but high consideration, power, and, above all, the satisfaction of that imperious Cymric sense of drama which Puritanism has denied secular outlet. All the motives—and of course more—that would tempt a country lad in England to the stage made a country lad in Wales 'pulpit-struck.' In David Lloyd, conscious of great powers of expression, fond of authority, ambitious of applause, the spectacle of the influence wielded by the great Welsh preachers early awakened strong emulation. But the accident that his uncle's sect frowned on a professional ministry was an insuperable bar to the adoption of the calling which would have afforded him the readiest opportunity of using his special gifts. Doctoring was suggested; but his horror of disease and death made that career impossible. From teaching he was cut off by the family scruples; to be a teacher meant to be, or to pretend to be, a Churchman. The suggestion was made to him, as to several of his schoolfellows, one of whom afterwards became a high dignitary of the Church. Imagination may indulge the pleasing vision of the Primate Mr. George might have been. But Lambeth itself would have beckoned in vain to the lad's mother and guardian, and no doubt to the lad himself.

There is a legend, which must be reluctantly rejected as untrustworthy, that Richard Lloyd, in his indecision, sought a sign. He put the boy, so the story runs, in a room containing a family Bible, a basket of apples, a paint-box, and a penny. Two hours later he looked in to see in what direction David's tastes had declared themselves. The apples were all gone; and the lad, seated on the Bible, was busily engaged in painting the penny yellow. If Providence declined directly to indicate a career, the boy's future was determined less by calculation than by hazard, for the lower branch of the law was finally chosen through little more than a whim on Mrs. George's part. At the time of her husband's death a kindly solicitor of Liverpool, entrusted with the legal charge of her poor affairs, had acted the part of a true friend as well as a wise counsellor. On this perhaps inadequate induction she had based a high respect for lawyers in general; her imagination warmed with the vision of her son as a legal knight errant, and this enthusiasm communicated itself to the lad.* He seems really to have entered the law with the conviction that it was not only a most respectable calling, but one permitting large opportunities of unselfish service to all who suffer and are heavy laden.

There were two grievous difficulties—money and education. The first was met by the fine generosity of

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* Mr. Hugh Edwards, M.P., 'D. Lloyd George.'

Richard Lloyd, who proposed to devote to the purpose all the small accumulations of a painful thrift. The Cerberus of culture was also appeased partly by his help. The Incorporated Law Society demands that its members shall have a 'liberal education,' which in practice means that they must have a knowledge of Latin and French, as well as English subjects, equal to that of most boys when they leave a fairly good school. The admirable David Evans had some Latin; French was an unknown tongue in Llanystumdwy. Richard Lloyd, 'the man for wisdom's various arts renowned' in all that region, therefore decided himself to learn French in order to teach it to his nephew; and the solemn elder and the lively youth set themselves to puzzle out the relation of the pen and the copy-book to the female gardener and the cousin of the grocer's wife. The difficulties of pronunciation alone must have been enormous under this method, and it is hardly odd that, while Mr. George reads French fluently, he cannot speak the language, or follow with any certainty a conversation between Frenchmen; French spoken in the English fashion—Mr. George has instanced the case of Viscount Grey—presents less difficulty. The time was to come when this disability—common, it is true, to nearly all British statesmen—was to prove a serious handicap. If Mr. George had been in a position to address Frenchmen fluently in their own tongue the history of the war and peace might have been considerably modified.

In December, 1877, all these preliminary difficulties were over; the examiners had decided that David Lloyd George possessed enough knowledge of things in general not to disgrace a learned profession. Arrangements were made to place him with a firm of solicitors in the business town of Portmadoc, and at a little over sixteen he was articled to the junior partner. The horizon of the lad now abruptly widened. Portmadoc is six inconvenient miles from Llanystumdwy, and the articled clerk, being able to go home only for week-ends, was thrown largely on his own resources. The best thing that can happen to any boy is to have a good home; the next best is to leave it; that first experience of a landlady adds years to age and cubits to mental stature. At seventeen Mr. George was what every lad of seventeen should be—a man. That is, with the vivacity of boyhood, he united that eager interest in things not childish, which, though systematically discouraged by the tendencies of modern education, is appropriate to early maturity. The firm with which he was engaged was a considerable one, doing much official business; and attendance at county courts, petty sessions, and meetings of local bodies gave him an insight into the way in which the country's affairs are managed, teaching him, incidentally, more constitutional history than is ordinarily gained from a reluctant perusal of Stubbs.

At night law's grave studies suffered the competition of a multitude of interests. The articled clerk's natural quickness enabled him with little difficulty to peck the essential grain from the dry husks of the law; the rapidity with which he could grasp any point astonished his principals and colleagues; but he was far from a hard and patient reader, and the chief advantage of the swiftness of his processes was that it enabled him to find time for all sorts of miscellaneous activities. During these years he managed to get through most of the English classics and the greater Frenchmen from Pascal to Hugo. But then, as later, he did not read in the spirit of the student, still less of the bookworm. The printed page might beguile an idle hour, or it might be eagerly scanned for ideas and information. But there was never in Mr. Lloyd George the worship of other people's words. His attitude was that of the country Nonconformist pastrycook who rejected the Vicaress's well-meant offer of calf's foot jelly for his sick child. 'You bain't of our persuasion,' he said, 'and we makes it ourselves.' Few of the great classics were of young Lloyd George's persuasion, or they would have been men of action like himself; and very early in life he must have been aware that, so far as concerned eloquence, he could make with less trouble than he could borrow. When he read it was more in the spirit of criticism than of reverence, and less for enjoyment than with a view to applying the results to the one dominant purpose and interest of his life.

For the boy's fancy for politics quickly grew to a passion in the youth, and the ideas he got from books were chiefly valued in proportion to their usefulness as political weapons. At seventeen he flew into a temper when some young men of his set chaffed him concerning his ambitions. 'Mark my words,' he said, as he left the room, 'you laugh now, but you will live to see me Prime Minister.' He was at this time already well on his way to that eminence. He began to speak at meeting-houses. He took part in the discussions of the local debating society. He exercised his great natural talents for journalism, since there was no other outlet, by letters and other contributions to the local papers. The admirable industry of admirers has availed to recover from the files a great number of these boyish productions, which appeared under the modest pseudonym of 'Brutus,' though the style and general character might rather suggest Mark Antony. No Anglican, no Tory, from Lord Salisbury downwards, was safe from this austere patriot. At the election of 1880 Mr. (afterwards Sir) Ellis Nanney, the squire of Llanystumdwy, had the presumption to contest Carnarvonshire. A few years before 'Brutus' had been forced to admit the merit of this Cæsar; the knickerbockered knee had been bowed, or rather the Glengarry cap had been touched, in the presence of the man whose father had endowed the village school. It was now the turn of the young tyrannicide, and if it was in an ecstacy of public spirit that he plunged his dagger into the breast of the local despot, it was perhaps a strictly personal satisfaction that he felt in turning the weapon round in the wound. 'You,' he wrote, 'are just the man whom the electors of Carnarvonshire would delight to reject with contumely.* The words proved prophetic; the abhorred but amiable Nanney, defeated by a large majority, was numbered among the goats, and Mr. George could feel that he had contributed in some degree to the Tory discomfiture.

This very early political utterance—the writer was only in his eighteenth year, a handsome boy with a rather long face and a wealth of wavy hair—is interesting in many ways. It shows how little Mr. George's style has changed in essentials. There are phrases—'dandlings of Liberal encouragement,' 'prodigies of Tory oppression,' 'supercilious and exacting landlords,' 'mainstay of despotism,' 'stiflers of aspiring liberty'—which might actually have occurred in the speeches of the mature statesman. But one passage is especially noteworthy. 'Brutus' has turned from the castigation of the local candidate to assail the Government he supports—a Government whose policy

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* Mr. Hugh Edwards, M.P., 'D. Lloyd George.'

> 'made Afghan mothers husbandless, their children fatherless, and both homeless, saturated the Afghan snows with the blood of patriots, and drove hatred of our very name and presence at the point of the sword into the heart of the Afghan nation; whose policy made Zululand moan the loss of thousands of its brave sons, devastated its fertile plains, turned its happy kraals into sombre mortuaries, and sacrificed its nationality upon a pyre erected with the carcases of its brave defenders.'

This outburst is obviously sincere; cynicism, however immature, would have avoided the topics of 'Afghan orphans' and 'happy kraals.' But the feeling revealed is not at all that of the pacificist; it is not the feeling which might have inspired Mr. Massingham at the same age. There is no horror of bloodshed, but only a hatred of aggression; no condemnation of war, but a most emphatic condemnation of trespass; the protest is not that of the humanitarian against carnage, but of the son of a small nation against the supposed wrongs of other small nations. The point is even more clearly brought out in a later criticism of the Egyptian war. Mr. Lloyd George approves Arabi Pasha, not only as a Nationalist leader 'who knew all the wants of the Egyptians because he had felt their wants himself,' but as a soldier directing a war of deliverance.

In fact, Mr. George was at this time distinctly of the older Puritan school, the school which glorified the sword of Joshua, and did not altogether disapprove the dagger of Ehud. He was an active 'Volunteer,' and he declared in debate, during an argument against perpetual pensions for successful generals, that 'it was the duty of every British subject to fight for his country without expecting a pension, since, by so fighting, he was defending his own interests as well as the interests of his fellows.' Later association with the English Puritans of the new soft-hearted school led Mr. George to adopt many of their arguments and perhaps (for the moment) some of their convictions; but what we feel is always more powerful than what we have schooled ourselves to say, and the conscriptionist of 1915 was much nearer the real Lloyd George than was the passionate pilgrim of disarmament of a somewhat earlier date. A man of blood Mr. George could never be; his common-sense as well as his humanity would avoid war if avoidance were any way possible; and for some years political fortune made him bedfellow with true Pacificists. But he has never had genuine affinities with English Pacificism, whether religious or agnostic.

An early pronouncement on Ireland deserves some little notice. Written at the age of nineteen, it shows that, if there is yet little originality of thought, there is much dexterity in handling the thought of others. There are words like 'riant' and 'fuscous' which suggest stylistic ambitions, but for the most part the young politician is content with the common coinage, and, as at a later period, the effect of eloquence is obtained by vigour rather than by distinction of language; so long as there is momentum in the rhetorical stream it matters nothing if it be a little turbid. We learn that Ireland suffers from the 'sores inflicted by satanic landlordism.' The 'god of property' is denounced, and the House of Lords arraigned as a 'lumber-room of musty prejudice' and an 'asylum of hereditary delusions.' It is the duty of statesmen to 'provide for the wants of a people before respecting the urbanity of a class,' to 'alleviate the misery of the poor before pandering to the vanity of the rich.' It is criminal to 'send a punt to save a boat's crew because the lifeboat is wanted for a pleasure trip,' and only after you have kept your family from starving can you properly 'apply what remains of your income to powder your flunkeys.' At this stage the young politician naturally dealt in generalities, but a very few years later he had come to definite conclusions concerning Ireland which were destined powerfully to affect his subsequent attitude. When Mr. Gladstone declared for Irish Home Rule, Mr. George immediately demanded Welsh Home Rule; he could not conceive how those who advocated the one could discover any plausible objection to the other. His position was thus much nearer Mr. Chamberlain's than Mr. Gladstone's, and while he neither liked nor trusted Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Chamberlain was at this time his hero. The Whigs, with their 'humdrum Liberalism,' were indeed only slightly less hateful to him than the Tories. It was little more than an accident which prevented Mr. George from being definitely drawn in the wake of the man whom he hailed in 1884 as 'without doubt the future leader of the people.' But when Mr. Chamberlain hardened into opposition to any kind of Home Rule Mr. George, with his already shrewd eye for practical politics, kept clear of the mutineers, and was soon even denouncing his former idol as a 'renegade.' But he never lost his liking for the 'Federal Solution,' otherwise 'Home Rule all Round,' and his attachment to Gladstonian Home Rule was always dubious and conditional.

The year 1884 was triply important to Mr. George, for in the course of it he came of age, passed with honours his final law examination, and was formally admitted as a solicitor. With characteristic courage he declined the safe inglorious servitude of a managing clerk, and at once set up for himself at Criccieth, whither his uncle and mother had removed from Llanystumdwy some four years before. Richard Lloyd's reserve fund was now quite exhausted, and the young lawyer had to earn his first fees in the police court before he could afford the three guineas for the robe and neck-band without which a solicitor is legally invisible to a County Court judge.* Though the plunge was bold to the point of temerity, sufficient business came almost at once to justify it, and before long 'branch offices' (of course on no magnificent scale) were established at

* Mr. Hugh Edwards, 'D. Lloyd George.'

Portmadoc and Festiniog. The choice of this latter place is indicative of the nature of Mr. George's industry; the quarrymen rather specialised in poaching, and Mr. George rather specialised in defending poachers. This professional work was a source of pleasure no less than profit; it enabled 'David Lloyd George, gentleman,' to pay off some old scores with the kind of people who used to trouble 'David Lloyd.'

An aggressively Radical solicitor is nowhere likely to be on good terms with a rural Bench, and in North Wales, as everywhere on the Celtic fringes, class feuds are more embittered than on the English countryside. Years of sleek deference would in any case have been needed to live down the opinions and antecedents of the Llanystumdwy shoemaker's nephew. But in fact Mr. George challenged rather than deprecated the resentments of a game-preserving magistracy. He made a point of straining to the utmost the privileges of an advocate, and never hesitated to charge a hostile bench with partiality. It was essential, he said after a more than usually lively encounter, to show that a solicitor could beard the justices 'without being led off to instant execution'.* Occasionally the client's interests may not have been advanced by the pugnacity of his advocate, but the advocate himself profited by the atmosphere of contention seldom absent when he appeared in court. He became widely known as able, fearless, pertinacious, and as especially the 'people's lawyer.' Law helped with politics, and politics with law. Mr. George became a power in the Revision Courts. The temperance party threw much work in his way. Cases in which political feeling was involved began to reach his office as a matter of course, and at last, in 1888, chance brought him an affair which added enormously both to his legal and his political fame.

This was the rather gruesome business widely known at the time as the Llanfrothen burial scandal. The Rector of Llanfrothen had assigned, in the burial ground attached to the parish church, a place for the interment of a poor Dissenter. But, being told that his services would not be required at the ceremony, he declined to permit burial in the grave already prepared, near that of the dead man's daughter, and would only grant in its place a plot in that 'sinister' part of the burial ground which was used for the interment of Jews, suicides, and drowned seamen. On Mr. George's advice the Dissenters defied this decision, forced the gate of the burial-ground, and buried the dead man in the grave first chosen. The Rector sued the relatives for damages, and won in the County Court on a point of law, the decision being that the graveyard, never having been legally conveyed to the parish by its donor, was the Rector's private property. On appeal the judgment was reversed, with some severe criticism on the Court below, and the young solicitor's reputation was greatly enhanced. 'By the time the struggle came to an end,' Mr. George himself said, 'my name was known all over Wales.'

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* Mr. Hugh Edwards, 'D. Lloyd George.'

This good fortune was the more welcome because, in the same year, Mr. George had taken on himself the responsibilities of a husband. For some three years he had paid attentions to Miss Margaret Owen, the daughter of a substantial farmer near Criccieth. Her family was at first a little doubtful as to the money-making capacity of the lover. But such apprehensions were set at rest by his extending practice, and the marriage had taken place on January 24, 1888. Local record preserves the fact that the town was 'illuminated' on the night of the wedding. It was apparently the bride's popularity rather than the bridegroom's position which justified this display, and the squibs were let off, not because Mrs. Lloyd George was descended from Owen Glendower and 'one of the best and greatest of the Welsh kings,' but on account of the local importance and respectability of her connections.

But while marriage might confirm Mr. George's position locally it seemed for the moment likely to retard rather than promote the realisation of those wider ambitions which he had never ceased to nourish. As long before as 1881 he had spoken of himself, on his first visit to London, as surveying the empty House of Commons in the spirit of William the Conqueror at the

Court of Edward the Confessor—'as the region of his future domain.' Nor was he alone in believing that a great political future lay before him. In 1885 a Nonconformist divine had predicted that he would become 'another Chamberlain.' Some time later Michael Davitt, after hearing him speak at a Welsh meeting, told him that he was destined to achieve a great Parliamentary name. During the whole of his early manhood he had striven, often at some cost of health, to improve every opportunity of getting into the inner political circle of North Wales. A tithes agitation favoured him, and there are many stories of how he scored off the clergymen whose meetings he invaded. A rising politician whose family history is known to everybody has need of all his powers to command the deference accorded as of right to the stranger, and occasionally rough jests were shot at the young orator. In the old Llanystumdwy days 'David Lloyd' used to deliver his uncle's boots and shoes, and his little donkey-cart was as familiar in the neighbourhood as the mail-van. One day, when addressing a meeting, Mr. George was annoyed by a man who continually shouted 'Where's the donkey and cart?' At last he retorted, 'As to the cart I have no information, and for the rest no information is necessary.' A few years of conscientious drudgery in public speaking in a country district give a man of quick parts a certain reputation, but it needs most exceptional talent or character to conquer the kind of prejudice illustrated in this incident. For several years it should have been obvious to the Liberals of Carnarvonshire that the young solicitor who could turn in a moment from the hardest matter-of-fact argument to the most eloquent emotional appeal, and who showed himself master of every rhetorical method in two languages, would make a far stronger Parliamentary candidate than some dull business man from Liverpool or some second-rate barrister from London. But though a few discerning men had detected the 'unaccredited hero,' he was generally regarded as simply a pushful, glib young fellow of no substance, well enough to second resolutions at big meetings and speak on village greens, but not to be thought of as a serious politician.

For a moment, however, Mr. George thought he saw his chance in the vacancy for Merionethshire in 1886. But the choice fell on Mr. 'Tom' Ellis, and the success of that Welsh democrat, while it might cause some natural envy, fortified Mr. George's assurance that his own opportunity would come. Still, at the time of his marriage, nothing seemed less likely than an almost immediate emergence from local to national politics. During 1888, however, the Liberals of Carnarvon Boroughs, looking for a strong and genuinely Welsh candidate, were disappointed in various quarters, and at every failure one or two persistent stalwarts, who wanted a 'good speaker,' one with a 'heart touched with a live coal from the altar on which our forefathers have been sacrificed,' suggested that the solicitor of Criccieth exactly corresponded to the requirements. At first these proposals were met with derision, but finally two local associations, representing the most fervid type of Welsh Radicalism and Nonconformist sentiment, definitely proposed his name in connection with the candidature. The choice was but reluctantly approved, many Liberals thinking Mr. George 'too advanced.' It needed a realistic thinker to reassure these timid people. 'Why be afraid?' he asked. 'He may be too advanced now, but most assuredly he will lose fifty per cent. of his Radicalism in the House of Commons.'

It was the voice of militant Nonconformity that carried the day. Whatever else might be said of the proposed candidate, his passion for Disestablishment was undeniable, and feeling against that 'old stranger,' the Established Church, was then at fever heat. Bangor was the last of the boroughs to accept Mr. George. In that pleasant little town even the Nonconformist Liberals tempered their religious and political hostility with a certain personal respect for opponents. They had often shaken a Bishop's hand, or been to tea at the palace, and, while they might think his theology deplorable, they could not deny that his manners and muffins were excellent. The squires, whom Mr. George denounced as the bad angels of the village, were merely the good customers of the town. Many Bangor tradesmen found defective taste, still more suspected poor business, in attacking men who, with all their faults, did not deal exclusively with the stores. At last, however, even Bangor yielded, and early in 1889 Mr. George, declaring himself 'a Welsh Nationalist first and a Liberal afterwards,' was formally adopted.

His position, however, was far from secure, and it was fortunate for him that the elections for the first County Councils gave him a new prestige and authority—first as the man who, in defiance of the advice of Lord Rosebery, organised Liberal victory, and secondly as an Alderman for Carnarvonshire. To be an Alderman, even a 'boy Alderman,' was something in the eyes of respectability. The clamour of this contest had barely died away when, in March, 1890, the death of the sitting Conservative Member put an end to any intrigues against Mr. Lloyd George on the part of the still unconvinced elder statesmen of the Carnarvon Boroughs. Without treason to the flag it was no longer possible to disparage the standard-bearer.

At the time the by-election of 1890 was merely an episode. An interesting episode, indeed, for the London papers sent down 'special representatives,' and the fluctuating fortunes of the candidates were followed with more than usual attention by the party head offices. The Conservatives were anxious, as every party having spent some years in office must be, as to the feeling of the country; the Liberals had been acclaiming the 'flowing tide,' with some disappointment that it did not flow a little faster. Nevertheless, in contemporary chronicles, the contest stands out less prominently than several long since forgotten. But in retrospect it assumes all the qualities of drama. Seldom, indeed, have the electoral fates so well discharged the functions of stage management. Causes and personalities were contrasted as in an allegory; the fight was like that between David and Goliath, or between Christian and Apollyon. Not that the Conservative candidate had anything to do with the powers of evil; he was that same well-intentioned Mr. Nanney at whose father's school Mr. Lloyd George had been educated, the same amiable Mr. Nanney whom 'Brutus' had called on the electors to 'reject with contumely.' Genially masterful, dignified, charitable and kind-hearted in his way, Mr. Nanney was naturally a little patronising to the young opponent whom he had probably patted on the head a few years before. On the other hand, the memory of that former relation seems to have added to the vivacity of Mr. George's attacks a touch of real bitterness seldom present in his speeches. Months after, when the election was but a memory, he could not refrain from a taunt concerning the 'small country squire flung aside by his neighbours for the sake of a country lad educated at a school given by his father.'

The contest was doubtful to the last. First the Liberals seemed to have all in their favour; then there was a threat of secession on the part of certain Nonconformists who insisted that the candidate, if elected, should not vote for Home Rule except on positive assurances that a Disestablishment Bill should be passed concurrently or immediately afterwards; then Mr. George redressed the balance by sounding, in the speech in which he declared that 'the day of the cottage-bred man has dawned,' a note which vibrated throughout the constituency.

The polling took place on April 10. The first count yielded a small majority for Mr. Nanney, and the returning officer was about to declare him elected when one of the Liberal agents, picking up a small bundle of papers credited to the Conservative candidate, discovered that, while the topmost was properly there, the rest of the votes were cast for Mr. George. 'Demand a recount,' he whispered. The votes were carefully scrutinised, and the amended result gave a majority of eighteen for the Radical.* It was small enough, but it sufficed to send a future Prime Minister to Westminster, and to save the Carnarvon Boroughs from extinction as a separate political entity. As the peculiar preserve of the most celebrated man in the British Empire they were to be exceptionally respected under that Act of 1917 which wiped out Salisbury, Windsor, and other ancient towns to make room for the growing democracies of Romford, Walthamstow, and Cardiff.

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* The actual figures were: Lloyd George 1963; Ellis Nanney 1945.

In his election address Mr. George, while declaring for Mr. Gladstone's 'noble alternative' to Irish coercion, and advocating the usual Liberal reforms, had judiciously kept in the background—or had rather left to be inferred—the unauthorised policy of 'Young Wales.' The Red Dragon had to be sought as in a puzzle picture. But in the moment of victory he was on speaking terms again with that rampant beast. Its banner, he declared after the poll, had been 'borne aloft in triumph.' 'It floats on high, dear countrymen,' he told the cheering crowd. 'The boroughs have wiped out the stains.'

It remains only to add that Mr. Ellis Nanney, denied the privilege of representing the boroughs, found consolation in the chairmanship of the Llanystumdwy Parish Council, and that twenty-seven years after the fight of 1890 Mr. Lloyd George, as Prime Minister, unveiled a portrait of his ancient enemy and patron.

CHAPTER III

THE man who thus found himself a member of Parliament at twenty-seven was a very different person from the lad who, as 'Brutus,' patronised Mr. Chamberlain and held Lord Salisbury up to obloquy. Photographs of both survive, and serve better than any verbal description to illustrate the changes brought by ten years of hard and bitter struggle.

The lad's face, if not precisely handsome, is eminently pleasing—open, humorous, good-natured, the face of one fundamentally satisfied with himself, and only dissatisfied with the world because it is not as good in its way as he knows himself to be in his. The man's face is less attractive—less engaging indeed, than at almost any other period. It has lost buoyancy and has not yet attained repose. It is the face of a highly combative person, but hardly that of a happy warrior; this man, one would say, is as yet fighting the fight of an Ishmaelite or a Red Indian rather than that of a soldier, let alone a crusader. The expression of the mouth is a little cruel, and the eyes seem to have the habit of looking everywhere (except in front of them) for ambushes and enemies. Years of hard professional struggle, of brow-beating and being brow-beaten, years of savage sectarian warfare on small local issues, anxious grasping after small fees and small political chances had not quenched the earlier idealism, but they had hardened and toughened and perhaps a little coarsened; and it was not until fortune had begun definitely to smile on Mr. George that the fundamental geniality of the man quelled the bitterness of the politician.

Mr. George in the early nineties might be compared with the hero of 'Monte Christo' before he lays hands on his treasure. He had escaped the Chateau d'If of his early captivity, but any accident, any mistake of judgment, might send him back, this time perhaps without hope. He carried with him the key to his desire; with due courage and resource all those imprisoned riches were his. But meanwhile there were terrible difficulties, and the worst of them was simple want of money. For some years the activities of Mr. George will be best understood if we think of him as of Edmond Dantes among the smugglers, sometimes fighting in causes of no interest to himself, sometimes courting, sometimes controlling men intrinsically inferior, playing his own game while seeming to be thinking solely of other people's, doing all (including the winning of a little occasional prize-money) with one object ever in mind and one handicap ever operating. A great deal will seem aimless and irrelevant without constant reference to the cardinal fact of his situation—the mere necessity to keep going.

There are many barriers between human individuals. But perhaps even the dividing lines of sex, nationality, race, creed, colour, native faculty, acquired culture are less decisive than that which separates the man who enjoys financial independence from the man who can never be sure of the next day's, or month's, or year's, or ten years' subsistence. There can easily be friendship, true and warm, between members of the two classes; there can never be understanding. It is not the simple question of toiling and spinning on the one hand, and thoughtlessly living in more than Solomon's glory on the other. Many rich people lead much harder lives than the generality of those who subsist on wages or fees. The whole point is that, while people of the one class can toil or spin, or leave off toiling and spinning, exactly as it suits them, people of the other are bound for ever to the wheel. The independent can indulge a sense of honour just as easily as they can nurse a cold. They can afford at all times a high conception of public duty. They can always command one of the greatest luxuries in life—the luxury of being disinterested. But, in revenge, circumstances forbid that they should understand the splendours that reside so often in the very faults and meannesses of those who can never escape the routine of wage-earning. People who rhapsodise about the 'dignity of labour' are often shocked because the labourer has a labourer's vices. Yet there are defects of character as inevitable, and really just as honourable, as the defects of body which come of hard work never shirked; as the mechanic could only maintain a perfectly white hand, so the mental toiler could only maintain a perfectly white soul, at the cost of treason to somebody. To the man or woman whose frame has been distorted, or whose nature has been warped, by the necessity of work, who has had to resort occasionally to shifts equally mean and necessary, the physical and moral graces of wealthy virtue are more exasperating than the frivolity and sensuality of the worthless rich. Perhaps that was why the old French aristocracy, safe while it merely bullied and idled and wasted, was hurried to the guillotine when, as a whole, it had begun to be human, kindly, decorative, and impressed with a sense of its responsibilities. It was really as if the people had exclaimed 'We could bear with you when you seemed to be mere blackguards and self-regarding fribbles, for then, despite your money, you were much as ourselves. But how dare you look and be so noble, simply because you alone can afford it?'

All this must be borne in mind by those who find astonishing the contrast between the 'class bitterness' of the early Lloyd George and the more kindly and tolerant attitude of the maturer statesman. He spoke bitterly because he felt bitterly, as most brilliant men do who find themselves constantly hampered by the meanness of circumstance. They easily persuade themselves that this resentment is not selfish; that they do well to be angry, not because of the injustice to themselves, but because of the insult to God who made them. Mr. George, always wanting but never worshipping money, fond of comfort but also loving large gestures, was rather exceptionally unfortunate. Until comparatively late in life, his financial position was insecure, and he was continually associated with, or in opposition to, men whose very income-tax, even on the old assessment, would have been esteemed by him a handsome income. Other men no better off might console themselves with the thought that their education, birth, or connection gave them a certain equality. But Mr. George, while almost too conscious of great talents, had no balsam of the sort for the wounds inflicted by the 'proud man's contumely'; and there is little doubt that the acidity of his earlier political utterance was largely due to the fact that he was disdained and neglected by the rich men of his own party. He was not, of course, poorer than many who enter Parliament. But his expenses, as a married man, were not indefinitely compressible; he belonged, not to 'the people,' but to the expansive middle class; his profession could not be very conveniently fitted in with Parliamentary work; and he lacked the inclination—so clever a man could hardly have remained without the opportunity—to take advantage of those means of supplementing an income which account for much of the attraction the House of Commons offers to penniless ambition. A certain class of poor member gravitates naturally into the world of company directors and promoters. Another automatically finds a way into the better paid kinds of journalism. A third picks up commissions of various kinds. Mr. George has never seriously divided his interests; he has always been a politician first and foremost. Beyond a certain amount of work for the *Manchester Guardian* (whose cheque he found, in his own words, 'very pretty,' though perhaps rather of the *mignon* order of beauty), he contributed little to the newspapers, and his name has rarely appeared in the solemn reviews which have never been thought beneath the dignity of a statesman.

While nobody has known better how to use the Press, a magnanimity, rare in these days, has prevented Mr. George from taking advantage of his position to seek great fees from rich newspapers.* Some of his colleagues have obtained as much as a thousand pounds for three or four articles of a few hundred words each. Mr. George, on the other hand, has often given for nothing an 'interview' which, if printed as an article, would readily have commanded a small fortune. It is true that he shares this dignified disregard for undignified gain with some very lowly people; Mr. Robert Smillie, for example, steadfastly declined to make easy money out of his official position. But many men much richer, and still better endowed in 'traditions' than in cash, have shown less delicacy.

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* Since the above was written Mr. George has given much more striking evidence of his disdain for money thus earned, devoting to charity the immense sum, in the neighbourhood cf £100,000, which he was to receive for his Memoirs.

If journalism, even in his most impecunious days, failed to divert Mr. George to any considerable extent from politics, he had still less inclination to the mysterious world of finance. Momentarily he entertained an idea of going to the Bar, and actually went so far as to enter his name at the Temple. Finally, however, he decided to stick to his own branch of the law. The steadfast loyalty and affection of his brother William enabled him, in spite of long absences in London, to maintain his connection with the business at Portmadoc, and he entered into partnership in London with a fellow-Welshman, Mr. Rhys Roberts. From neither source, however, could his professional earnings have been great. These facts, of course, cut both ways. Having no division of interest such as that of the great barrister-politician, Mr. George was able to throw a preponderating share of his energies into politics; on the other hand, he was condemned to much from which the possession of an assured income would have rendered him exempt. He was in the position of a gambler with very little in reserve, who must always risk, but must never risk too much, and during the first few years of his Parliamentary life we are conscious of something at once daring and tentative. There is always some well defined plan for the immediate future; there are always shadowy plans for the distant future; there is little or no connection between the two sets of plans. He must look ahead, but not too far ahead; no advance, however bold in seeming, can be made without bearing in mind the possibilities of retreat; alliances are temporary, and often dictated by purely personal considerations; there is a wealth of ideas, but little trace of fixed principle. A habit persisted in for years becomes second nature, and the Prime Minister, like the private member, has always tended to meet the daily emergency by the daily expedient, finding it less trouble to invent a new plan than to remember an old philosophy.

During his first two Parliaments Mr. George was a Welsh Nationalist first and foremost, and only incidentally a Liberal. The question he put within a fortnight of taking his seat was ingeniously devised to define his position as especially Welsh, Nonconformist, and anti-landlord. Incidentally it established him also as the owner of an easily remembered name. A search of Hansard fails to discover him under the 'G's.' He is already 'Lloyd George.' In public life all sorts of trifles count, and there is a clear advantage in having either one uncommon name or two common ones.

With his already keen sense of tactics the young member delayed his maiden speech until a favourable opening occurred. A new member can always catch the Speaker's eye once; the second opportunity depends on the use he makes of the first. Mr. George waited until he had really something to say and a good opening for saying it. It was five-twenty-three by the clock on June 13, 1890, when he rose first to address the assembly that he has since so often held under his spell. The subject under debate was the Local Taxation (Customs and Excise Duties) Bill. Mr. George, as an orthodox member of the temperance party, inveighed against certain provisions for compensating the owners of suppressed public house licences. A new member's reverence for his constituents apparently led him to begin by warning the Government that their policy had been disapproved by the Carnarvonshire County Council; it was an example, of which parallels were to be found much later, of the uncertain action of Mr. George's undeniable sense of humour. But after the first few halting sentences he began to give his new audience some hint of the powers which were to be so formidably developed. Never, he declared, had there been so puny an attempt to grapple with a great evil 'since the Lilliputian king drew his hanger to attack Gulliver.' He chaffed Lord Randolph Churchill on the evaporation of the temperance ardour he had recently displayed; 'as with many another temperance advocate the holidays seem to have affected his principles.' With Lord Randolph he coupled Mr. Chamberlain—

> The right hon. gentleman not so very long ago—I think it was in Wales—promulgated the doctrine of ransom. Now, if we understand that great doctrine, it is the exact converse of compensation. But the right hon. gentleman and the noble lord seem to be a kind of political contortionists, after the manner of the American performers who can set their feet in one direction and their faces in another, and no one knows which way they intend to travel.

The speech lasted seventeen minutes. Though it was not exactly disappointing the speaker was no doubt a little disappointed. The House was not, as has been so often represented, taken by storm. The only serious reference to Mr. George in subsequent debate was contributed by Mr. Gladstone, who said he could 'support much that was said so ably by the hon. member for Glamorgan.' Carnarvon was obviously meant. But the very uncertainty in Mr. Gladstone's mind is eloquent of the real position of the young member. He was only a man from Wales, who had produced a certain effect by badinage of the kind which House of Commons taste approves. One of the London papers distinguished the speech as 'rather clever,' and that was an end of it.

A livelier sensation was caused by an intervention two months later in Committee on the supplementary Civil Service Estimates. In the nineties there was still a degree of sentiment, represented a little earlier by Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, which, if not Republican, was at least anti-Royal; and questions of grants for ceremonial purposes were rather ungraciously scrutinised. It happened that Prince Henry of Prussia had been installed as a Knight of the Garter at a cost of £439 3s. 4d. The funeral of the Duchess of Cambridge had cost the country £180. There was a more considerable item of £2764 for the equipage of the Irish Viceroy. Things like these are not the peculiar extravagances of a monarchical government; and, inexperienced as Mr. Lloyd George then was, he could hardly have been unaware that ceremonial plays an indispensable part in the life of all civilised States. But it was the fashion of the time—the time of Tranby Croft—for vigorous young democrats to say nasty things about Court expenditure. Mr. Lloyd George's words were deeply meditated; one of his biographers* says, with reference to his description of the Viceroy as 'simply a man in buttons who wears silk stockings and has a coat of arms on his carriage,' that the phrase 'man in buttons' occupied a special place in his notes. The rest of the speech was in the same key. 'Thousands of hard-working thrifty men are living a life of hopeless, ceaseless toil, and yet we are asked to spend hundreds in decorating a foreign Prince and thousands in adorning a mere supernumerary. . . . I do not believe that all this gorgeousness, and this ostentation of wealth, is necessary in order to maintain the constitution.' The criticism of the money spent on the Duchess's funeral roused in a special degree the ire of the loyalists. Mr. Atkinson, an eccentric Lincolnshire member, offered to write out a cheque for the sum rather than permit it to be profanely debated. The incident was just a little more important than it might seem in retrospect, since it was the beginning of an alliance with the robust English Radicals who followed the lead of Mr. Henry Labouchere.

At this period Mr. George was not only carefully violent but systematically disregardful of party discipline. Chastised by the Liberal Press for voting, in defiance of the Whip, against a Tithes Bill, he declared that he refused for once and all to 'make mere party the god of his idolatry.' Yet no less a Liberal than Mr. John Morley had discerned in him one who would be ready to take in his hand the 'lamp of progress' when the older statesmen were gone. It was a curious metaphor to come from such a quarter, since nothing could be less like the mild illuminant of John Stuart Mill than Mr. George's naphtha flares. For the present, however, Mr. George was chiefly violent against the clergy, the landlords, and the publicans, and had disclosed little tendency to those economic heresies which would have most shocked Mr. Morley. The clergy at this time he attacked with extraordinary vehemence as

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* Mr. H. Duparcq.

'sanctified society prigs' and (in the higher ranks) as oppressors whose luxuries were ministered to by a 'host of menials.'

This studied violence brought him in sharp collision with Mr. Gladstone during the last days of Mr. George's first Parliament. The Clergy Discipline Bill, introduced by a Conservative Government, had no more enthusiastic supporter than the aged leader of the Opposition. It was, moreover, a measure to most people so obviously beneficent in its object that it might be thought safe from the extreme of partisan rancour. Its purpose was simply to make easier the Bishops' task of ridding the Church of persons who, having taken orders, had been found guilty of moral offences, bringing discredit on religion in general and on the Church in particular. To Mr. George, however, it had the aspect of a 'Bishops' Relief Bill,' and to lighten the cares of the episcopate was far from his desire.

It must be remembered that Mr. George was then, if not himself a fanatic, much under the influence of fanaticism, and very closely in contact with a state of mind not easily understood in a land where theological hatred, like all other passions, assume a mild form. To the Welsh Nonconformist the Church was represented by the religious Press as not merely slack and selfish, but actively malignant. Thus the *Seren*, a Baptist organ, could write :—'The history of the Church is scandalous. Her mother was a harlot and her father was an adulterer. She grew up an ugly and an imperious creature. She persecuted the Nonconformists, tortured the philanthropists, stole from the neighbours, hanged the innocent, threw the heroes of liberty in gaol. . . . What of her clergy? They are either in their parlours smoking, shooting hares in the fields, making ready to dance, or drinking hot spirits in tap-rooms. What matters it to them if the poor starve? Slaveholders have they been throughout the ages.'

Thus *Y Baner*, a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist paper, could describe the parsons as 'enough to make Beelzebub hide his head for shame, presumptuous and shameless as he is,' and could declare that the successors of the apostles had nothing to learn from Henry Irving in 'wolfish wrinkling of the brow, fierce and angry glances of the eyes, Judas-like showing of the teeth, and a face of many colours.'

It was natural enough that in his capacity of conducting rod Mr. George should communicate to the House of Commons something of this frantic heat. In alliance with Mr. S. T. Evans (afterwards President of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division) he entered on a virulent opposition to this 'measure to cheapen the process of getting rid of criminous clerks.' Poor as the case might be, he made the best of it. His second reading speech was even more able than bitter, and he succeeded in drawing a painfully reluctant tribute from his own leader. 'I have no reason to believe that any other Member could have made a better case,' said Mr. Gladstone in the course of an appeal that Mr. George should not 'search with something of feverish heat for arguments of all kinds, in order to put this Bill away.' Mr. Gladstone's reply to the Welsh rebel has sometimes been described as a severe castigation. It seems to have been rather a plea for mercy on the part of a very old man who saw something he held holy being trampled in the dust.

In the obstruction to this Bill Mr. George first appears as a leader. Mr. Tom Ellis, the chief of the Welsh group, had little heart for the business, and the small band of rebels derived their whole inspiration from the member for Carnarvon Boroughs. Mr. George thoroughly enjoyed the experience of having all the batteries of the official Opposition directed against him—the moral glare of Mr. Gladstone, the light raillery of Mr. Augustine Birrell, the heavy reproofs of Mr. Campbell-Bannerman. He had already come into collision with the party officials by his opposition to the Free Education Bill as a further endowment of 'The Old Enemy'; in failing to fight it, the Liberals, Mr. George thought, had shown 'funk,' and in this, as in kindred matters, he preferred the enthusiastic applause of Wales to the careless and unprofitable approval of the Liberal Whip.

When the battle over the Discipline Bill was over, the new member had at last made a definite position for himself. Sir Charles Dilke had remarked his 'ability and business aptitude'; the Government had been obliged to take note of him as a free lance capable of giving considerable annoyance; the official Opposition could never be quite sure what he was going to say or do—a great advantage (if not abused) to a private member. Outside the Welsh group Mr. George had made a few allies. Mr. Labouchere and his friends had been secured by the anti-Court outburst; Mr. W. S. Caine and other leaders of the temperance party had begun to value his eloquence on the platform and his powers of offence in the House; and the last campaign of obstruction had brought him in close contact with a young Scottish Radical, Mr. Henry Dalziel,* with whom he was destined to maintain a long, close, and eminently useful association. It would, however, be still an exaggeration to speak of him as more than a quite minor Parliamentary figure. Had the election of 1892 gone against him it would have been nobody's interest to help him back to the House, and it was great good fortune that he managed to retain the seat against Sir John Puleston by two hundred votes.

The new House allowed Mr. George far greater opportunities than he had so far enjoyed. From being a wholly unimportant group, the Welsh Nationalists suddenly rose to a position of great consequence. The new Liberal Government's tenuous majority of forty could only be maintained by the support of the 'Celtic fringes,' and the value of that support mounted abruptly. Wales had returned but two Conservative members. The attitude of the Welsh Radicals, and indeed of almost every individual Welsh Radical, became a vital question.

The Government was in a difficulty over Wales only second to its main anxiety of Ireland. Welsh Disestablishment had been promised in the Newcastle Programme, and there was bound to be trouble if no serious attempt were made to implement the pledge. On the other hand, Mr. Gladstone hated the whole business. It was quite a different story from the

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*Afterwards Lord Dalziel, the controller of important Coalition newspapers.

'ecclesiastical arrangements for Ireland' nearly a quarter of a century before. In Ireland the Church was very 'low,' and Mr. Gladstone deemed it spiritually dead. In Wales he perceived both life and grace abounding. It is probable, also, that Mr. Gladstone was less sympathetic to the Welsh Dissenters than to the Irish Roman Catholics; the latter were of course gravely in error, but they did not offend his taste : his taste and his theological bias were both ranged against the Welsh demand. Finally, he was very old, and Welsh Disestablishment, as getting in the way of Home Rule, was quite simply a nuisance.

But how to shelve the question without alienating the all-important Welsh members? The Ministry had a happy inspiration. By bringing into the Government Mr. Tom Ellis, the 'cottage-bred' leader of Welsh democracy and Nonconformity, the Principality would be flattered and its chief spokesman would be gagged. The offer was made; in an incautious moment Mr. Ellis accepted it; and by so doing destroyed his own power and gave Mr. George the first great opportunity of his life. Henceforth, without a suspicion of self-seeking or disloyalty to a highly popular chief, he could pursue to its logical conclusion the policy he had determined on. He could be the 'Parnell of Wales.' For a time he went on quietly. When in 1893 the Government introduced a Welsh Church Suspensory Bill, designed to stop the creation of further vested interests in the Church in Wales, he described the second reading debate as 'good fun,' and indeed he must have been prodigiously heartened by Sir John Gorst's quaint defence of the Establishment as 'not an unmixed evil.' But he did not take the measure very seriously, and was content to await Mr. Gladstone's retirement before beginning business in earnest. In the Home Rule debate he took no share; in view of the Welsh idolatry for Mr. Gladstone he could not safely criticise the Bill; in view of his own preference for the 'Federal solution,' he probably preferred not to commit himself to a plan plainly doomed to disaster. Much might happen before the Irish question next arose, and, though Mr. George has never hesitated when necessary to go back on his past professions, he has seldom needlessly multiplied the occasions for doing so.

With the old lion's departure our cautious Daniel could 'dare to stand alone'—or nearly so. For a Welsh Radical member, serious revolt against Mr. Gladstone had been out of the question; Wales might enjoy the spectacle of one of her sons making even the ancient chieftain a little uncomfortable over Disestablishment, but the precipitation of a real crisis would have been fatal to the plotter. Mr. Gladstone's Government was safe so long as Mr. Gladstone remained. But Lord Rosebery's Government enjoyed no such immunity; he was a youngster, a Peer, an owner of race-horses, a Laodicean, and perhaps worse. In any well-founded quarrel with the new Prime Minister, Mr. George might depend on a large Welsh following, and so far he had scarcely begun to think of any following that was not Welsh. His attitude of contingent rebellion was decisively taken up the moment Mr. Gladstone resigned. When Mr. Asquith introduced a Disestablishment Bill in the spring of 1894 Mr. Lloyd George refused to receive the party whip. It was not the Bill to which he objected. The Bill was in its main lines what he and his friends had demanded. But it could not in the circumstances be taken seriously. It was not meant to be carried; he saw it as simply 'a plan to keep Welsh votes.' In that belief Mr. Lloyd George was willing to become little more than a Party of one in the House; his real audience, then as ever, was the country, and in this case the country was Wales. There began to be a great deal of talk about a Young Wales party; and Lord Rosebery, despite the disapproval of Sir William Harcourt, was screwed up to a definite pledge that before Parliament was dissolved the Disestablishment Bill should be forced through the Commons. When the measure was again produced in 1895 in accordance with this undertaking Mr. Lloyd George declared that, if not all he could wish, it was capable of improvement, and he maintained his interest through the sittings in Committee. On one of his amendments the Government would have been defeated had he not relented at the last moment, and Mr. Asquith's concessions to the

Church party were hotly resented. One important amendment was accepted by the Government, placing the control of the Welsh tithe in the hands of an elected Welsh council instead of a body of appointed bureaucrats. This was held to be a valuable admission of Welsh nationality, and, having secured it, Mr. Lloyd George retired to his mountains to proclaim the triumph, and to rally the electors, who, as a recent by-election had shown, were beginning to turn to Conservatism in sheer disgust over the impotence of Parliamentary Liberalism.

When the Rosebery Government was defeated on the cordite resolution, Mr. Lloyd George and several of his associates were absent unpaired. Reproaches he met with hardy impenitence. Internal dissensions, he said, had brought the Ministry to ruin, and he left it to be inferred that what had to be so painfully kept alive was better dead. Indeed, whatever the misfortunes of the Liberal party, he had no reason to take them tragically. His own reputation had constantly risen during the troubled interlude. Mr. Tom Ellis, soon to be removed by death, had even now ceased to be a serious force in Wales; Mr. D. A. Thomas, with all his wealth and influence, was manifestly in a secondary position; Sir George Osborne Morgan, the chairman of the party, was physically broken. Mr. Lloyd George had only to wait and play his cards adroitly. Five years in Parliament had brought him within reach of the political dictatorship of the Principality. At Westminster, it is true, he remained merely one of the more interesting of the lesser personalities. 'A young man,' wrote an acute observer,* who speaks well by natural aptitude, and has plenty of self-assertion, with boundless persistence and insistence. . . . He does not seem to carry weight with the Liberal party, nor has he, so far, found his way to the esteem of the House at large.' In English eyes, indeed, he was still little more than a fresh Celtic complication. The English Nonconformists had begun to look on him as an ally of some value; the temperance party had welcomed him on their platforms.

* Sir Richard Temple.

But there was no general recognition of a new force in wider matters.

That he should succeed in England it was necessary that Mr. Lloyd George should first fail in Wales. He was often spoken of at this time as the 'Parnell of Wales.' But the phrase, though it indicated accurately enough the nature of his aims, ill defined his actual position. With small means and an increasing family he could not take the risks, and therefore could not grasp the gains, of Parnell. The next few years were to prove the failure of his scheme for the leadership of a united Wales, and in doing so to prepare the greater success. Meanwhile, if he had not gained mastery in his own country, he had at least achieved a resounding reputation. From the defence of poachers he had risen to the defence of Welsh Nonconformity and Welsh democracy. He had defied Gladstone. He had mocked at the idols of English Toryism. He had refused to be tied to the car of the dominant race, with whatever Party colours it might be decked. He had snapped his fingers at Royalty itself. When the Liberal Government had offered Wales a boon, he had looked at it as coolly as a horse-coper looks at a hack, criticised it, and finally declared it not good enough. London might call him a provincial figure, and in truth London was right; for many years he remained quite provincial, and perhaps, even at Versailles, at Cannes, and at Genoa the tone was not quite lost. But he was at Westminster not in the spirit of the admiring rustic, awed and submissive, but rather in that of some fierce young barbarian who, in Imperial Rome, surveyed the magnificence which was to be his own, and wore his sheepskin as if it were already the purple.

CHAPTER IV

In the election of 1895, so generally disastrous to Liberalism, Mr. George was fortunate enough to retain his seat against Mr. Ellis Nanney by a majority only slightly less than that of 1892.

He had promised to be in the new Parliament 'a thorn in the side of Mr. Balfour,' and in some degree the pledge was fulfilled. But it has never been his habit to give unnecessary time to the House of Commons; few statesmen of his standing have shown so little affection for that assembly, or have contrived to produce at so small a cost of exertion the effect of a great Parliamentarian. At this time his feeling towards the House was almost bitter. Conscious of some failure to impress it, he ascribed the fact less to any shortcomings of his own than to the soullessness of his surroundings. It had not recognised him, perhaps because his way of speaking, which roused enthusiasm at meetings, was not suited to the smaller audience, perhaps because it was generally thought that he was playing too exclusively his own game. His uncle had constantly to combat his discouragement, and but for such affectionate goading it is probable that he would have shown even less patience with the 'industrious idleness' of Parliamentary life. During the exciting period of 1890-5 he had displayed only intermittent activity. With a Unionist Government strongly entrenched, with an Opposition rent by every kind of dissension, with the raising of questions, Colonial and Imperial, in which he as yet took little interest, Parliamentary work was now less than ever likely to absorb his full energies. From 1895 to the outbreak of the Boer War Mr. Lloyd George's main interest was his position in Wales. At Westminster he appeared chiefly in the part of a guerilla skirmisher; in his own country he was occupied in a distinctly constructive policy which, though it failed, was not ill designed to give him the authority of a dictator.

Wales, by tradition and to some extent in fact, is divided into two halves, North and South, and for political purposes each half had its own Liberal organisation. That of the rich and progressive South had for many years been a model of efficiency, and in the eighties and early nineties it had shown itself not only ardently Radical but eminently patriotic. The North Wales Liberal Federation was, on the other hand, inefficient, Whiggish, and so dead to national sentiment that its meetings were often held on English soil, sometimes at Shrewsbury, sometimes at Chester, railway convenience being generally the decisive factor.

Mr. George, long before he entered Parliament, had protested against this state of things, and had advocated the fusion of the two bodies into a National League. But whenever any institution is suggested for Wales as a whole strife invariably follows as to headquarters. Cardiff, on account of its size and wealth, is always suggested by the South. The historic claims of Carnarvon, Bangor, and other small cities are as eagerly pressed by the Northerners. Attempts at compromise are doomed to failure, as was proved when Aberystwith was chosen as the educational centre of the Principality; neither section has ever been satisfied. The want of a Metropolis was, and is, a serious check to Welsh Nationalism.

Since the idea of the National League shattered on this rock, Mr. George set about improving the efficiency of the Northern organisation. This was accomplished by the simple process of killing the North Wales Federation, and putting in its place a body hopefully called the Welsh National Council. Fully to justify its title, however, the South Wales Federation had to be put out of the way, and as a matter of courtesy it was invited to commit *seppuku*. To such Japanese self-sacrifice the good people of the South objected. They saw no reason why they should submit themselves to a parcel of country lawyers and tenant farmers, and in proportion as nationalism grew in the North it declined in the South. When Mr. George first went to the House of Commons, 'Home Rule for Wales' was a more popular cry in the southern counties than in his own Boroughs.

Six or seven years later the position was reversed. North Wales was rather pronouncedly Nationalist. South Wales was getting steadily more anglicised in fact, if not in profession. And in Mr. D. A. Thomas (afterwards Lord Rhondda) it had a leader little inclined to narrow nationalistic views. A citizen of the world, with interests in every part of the kingdom and many parts of the globe, he could hardly think in terms of 'Wales for the Welsh,' and his attitude to all intensification of nationality, whether linguistic or otherwise, must have been unsympathetic. The Welsh language to him seemed simply an obstacle to progress, and the exaggeration of Nationalism merely bad business. Nationalism flourishes best in a light soil. Where there is great wealth what is not imperialism tends to internationalism.

Mr. Thomas, therefore, became by force of circumstances pitted against his former colleague, and even for Mr. George he was no mean antagonist. He had on his side money, the authority of a great employer, and a capacity rare in business men for politics. Almost alone among the business men called in under the Coalition Government of 1916, he showed himself equal to his task. On Disestablishment he had stood shoulder to shoulder with Mr. George. But along the road to Nationalism indicated by designs to destroy the South Wales Liberal Federation he would not go, and in 1897 he withdrew from the Welsh Parliamentary Party, in which, however, his influence remained. In the same year died Sir George Osborne Morgan, and an attempt was made to secure the vacant Chairmanship for Mr. George, his name being proposed by Mr. Reginald McKenna, a recently elected Monmouthshire member, destined to great office in a future Liberal Government. A contest seemed likely, but Mr. George withdrew in favour of Mr. Alfred Thomas, afterwards Lord Pontypridd. In 1899 came the real trial of strength on the death of Mr. Tom Ellis. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the new Liberal leader, had offered to appoint another Welsh member to his place at the Liberal Whips' office. Mr. George now made a bid to establish a real Parnellism in Wales, bringing forward a resolution for the formation of an independent party on the Irish model. It is fascinating to speculate what might have happened had he gained the day. Had the connection with English Liberalism been broken, there was no other possible leader, and Wales must have henceforth claimed him. But these things were not to be. His resolution was burked by a temporising amendment, inspired by Mr. D. A. Thomas; and though no knock-out blow was given Mr. George was beaten on points. Thus the late Lord Rhondda must (under Providence) be credited with having definitely filched David Lloyd George from Wales and given him to mankind. Five months later the Boer War thrust the future Prime Minister into the thick of Imperial and international controversy, and at the end of the war he was in only a restricted sense a Welsh leader. Henceforward Wales remains in his perorations; Wales continues his own electoral appanage, his political *peculium*. But Wales no longer gives him a definite political inspiration.

Mr. George's general activities during this period need only be rapidly reviewed. In 1896 we find him winning Sir William Harcourt's congratulations for his work in opposition to the Agricultural Relief Bill. Of all the young men on the Liberal side, we are told,* he made the greatest mark during this Session. Not only did he defy the Speaker and bring upon himself a week's suspension, but he charged the Government with benefiting by its own legislation to the extent of £56,000 a year; Mr. Henry (afterwards Viscount) Chaplin, who introduced the Bill, would, he said, be £700 better off under it. Indignant denials were brushed aside. 'Taking the capital value of the land,' said Mr. George, 'the Ministry would benefit under the Bill to the extent of two and a quarter millions. Having bled the farmer to the last drop of his blood, the landowners are now going to bleed the taxpayers, who are to be drawn into their leech-pond.' The business has a certain significance. For the first time it brought Mr. George fully into line with the English Radicals, and it even foreshadowed 'The People's Budget.'

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* By a writer in the *Daily Chronicle*.

The next year he distinguished himself by a most acrimonious opposition to a Voluntary Schools Bill. A Conservative critic* records that the attack was conducted almost entirely by Welsh members, who showed an ingenuity only equalled by their 'rancorous hostility to the Church.' Among them he distinguishes Mr. George as vieing with any for 'ability and bitterness' and 'certainly taking the palm for violence of language.' Indeed this excess was often deplored by 'many of his friends who recognised his remarkable Parliamentary gifts, and admired the pluck and grit which he had displayed since he entered the House.' There was a further opportunity for the militant Nonconformist in the Benefices Bill of 1898, although the sole object of the measure was to check the ancient sin of simony; and in 1899, on the second reading of the Tithe Rent-charge (Rates) Bill, Mr. George made what was, perhaps, the most effective speech he had so far delivered in the House of Commons. After drawing indignant exclamations by a sharp attack on a country parson, he retorted :—

'I do not see why these gentlemen should be spared. They are coming here to ask for £87,000 at the expense of the people, who are suffering in many cases far more than they are, and it is high time the facts were stated about them. They are not taxed on their professional income. The point has been made over and over again that the maintenance of the poor was a tax upon the tithe. That has been challenged. Of course it was imposed in the first instance for the maintenance of the poor. We hear a good deal in these days about the opinion of the fathers of the Church. It is always quoted wherever there is a question of ritual. One of these holy fathers wrote "You pay tithes for God's Church, let the priest divide them into three; one part for the repairs of the Church, the second part for the poor, and the third for God's servant." What has become of the poor's third part? At the present moment they are getting 2s. in the £, or a tenth (through the rates) whereas formerly it was a third, or six and eightpence. Now they say a tenth is too much; "we should only pay a twentieth." The Fathers of the Church may be good enough for quotation to justify a breach of the law in regard to extravagant ritual, but when it is a question of fulfilling the obligations imposed by them, the Fathers of the Church are thrown overboard and "the King *v.* Jodrell" is brought in instead.'

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* Mr. (now Sir) Arthur Griffith Boscawen, 'Fourteen Years in Parliament.'

Hatred to landlordism—and perhaps another feeling—was revealed in the opposition to Mr. Gerald Balfour's Irish Local Government Bill. The average Liberal, and especially the Front Bench Liberal, saw good reason to leave this measure alone, since all the Irish were in its favour. Parnellite, anti-Parnellite, and even Irish Unionist had no objection to some hundreds of thousands of pounds going into the landlords' pockets; were not landlords also Irishmen? Mr. George, failing to incite the Irish against the Bill, finally threatened them. If they were to be deaf to the tunes of the Welsh harp could they expect Welshmen to dance to the music of that which once sounded in Tara's halls? The Irish strongly resented a resolution moved under Mr. George's influence in favour of 'Home Rule All Round,' which in their opinion meant indefinite postponement of Irish Home Rule.

Worse was to follow. In the beginning of 1892 Mr. George, speaking on the Address, protested against the idea of setting up a Roman Catholic University for Ireland, Nonconformists were determined to oppose, 'from whatever quarter it might come,' a university Catholic in tone and atmosphere. This attitude might seem peculiar in one who professed self-determination in matters of religion. But reference must be had to the peculiar atmosphere in which Mr. George was reared, and to the influences still strong on him.

About this time a Nonconformist periodical widely circulated in Wales could write concerning Catholicism,* 'It is well known that Popery is a compendium of all the cruelties, abominations and disgraceful corruptions that ever crossed the threshold of the Devil's abode. Bells of pandemonium rang merrily when the system was established, and in every chamber of hell there was dancing and gaiety. The sole difference between the Churches of England and of Rome is that the former is the tail and the latter is the head.'

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* '*Y Baner.*'

It must be remembered that Mr. Lloyd George was still in the closest touch with friends and relatives to whom such language would not seem exaggerative. His mother had died in 1896, but his uncle continued to write him almost daily letters in which spiritual admonishment jostled quaintly with shrewd practical advice. It was thus natural that he should have little in common with the Irish Nationalists. A political conviction—and Mr. Lloyd George's attachment to the cause of Irish Home Rule seems to have been always rather languid—can never have the strength of a religious prejudice, and though Mr. Lloyd George sat near the Irish* and often addressed the House from the corner seat usually occupied by Mr. Tim Healy, there was probably no member more spiritually remote from almost everything for which the Irish members stood.

Only one more fact remains to be noted concerning Mr. George's political activities during these years. During the Budget debate of 1896 he asked for a remission of duty on tea grown within the Empire, and could thus, had he wished, have claimed the credit of anticipating by some years Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's Zollverein plan.

On the personal side, it is significant to note his removal from Central London to the suburbs. After early residence in Gray's Inn and the Temple, the obvious refuges of a bird of passage, he had taken more permanent quarters in Kensington. But in 1899 the growing family of the Georges compelled another move, and a 'desirable villa residence' was chosen in Routh Road, Wandsworth Common. This hegira had a meaning not to be overlooked. The still young politician was fighting three separate battles. There was the battle for a firm hold on Wales, and that could never be long neglected. There was the battle for recognition in the House of Commons, which had sometimes to be intermitted, as being, for the moment, of the least importance. Finally there was the battle for bread-and-butter. This, partaking of the sullen character of trench warfare, was the most formidable of all. It was won, as we know, and the bitter struggle did not altogether prohibit an occasional relaxation, such as the trip to the Argentine in 1896 and the Canadian tour in which Mr. George was engaged when the Boer War broke out. But the strategic retreat to Wandsworth suggests that the event might have been otherwise, and that the spirit of the adventurer might have been broken, or perhaps hopelessly embittered, by an indefinite prolongation of the triple struggle for bread, fame, and security.

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* On the second bench below the gangway on the Opposition side.

From such a fate he was saved by a series of events which, first threatening his complete ruin, ended by lifting him into a position in which his great talents could no longer be denied full scope.

CHAPTER V

Who made the Boer War it is not for the present writer to discuss. He is content to note that the Boer War made Mr. Lloyd George. Before it he was merely a Parliamentary figure, amusing while he was there, certain to be forgotten the moment he lost his seat. At the end of it he was a political power—a man who might be hated, mistrusted, or feared, but must always be taken into calculation. More important still, he could no longer be conceived as a mere self-seeker. Over many distinguished men of his own party he had established a moral supremacy by the mere fact that, while they had played a game which, however honourable, was safe and popular, he had risked all, and suffered much, for the assertion of a principle. By his opponents he might be denounced as a profligate Minister, an unscrupulous demagogue, and (in moments of imaginative enfeeblement) a 'little Welsh solicitor.' But it could not be added that he was a pure opportunist.

That much established, it was no disadvantage that he should acquire the reputation of a shrewd and somewhat cynical judge of opportunities. In our politics the man who obviously and consistently plays for his own hand commands little permanent influence; the man of rigid principle rarely attains influence in the highest degree. The action of each is too easily calculable. The House of Commons likes principle, but not too much of it; so long as there is enough to keep a character sweet, the little more is not wanted. The greatest power is always wielded by the genuinely able man whose attitude can never be precisely foretold, who will oft consent to be bent 'like a good bilbo, hilt to point, heel to head,' but will on occasion take his stand firmly and risk all for something he believes vital. Mr. Gladstone's domination would not have been so complete had he been gifted only with the moral fervour of Bright; he was also, to an extent now half forgotten, the 'old Parliamentary hand,' always, as it has been said, 'with an ace up his sleeve and ready to protest that Providence put it there.'

It has been a great advantage to Mr. George that no colleague, no opponent, no party could tell quite how far he would go or what he was prepared to sacrifice, how much he believed in his own measures or his own leaders, and in what degree at any particular moment he would be swayed by a genuine emotion or influenced by his highly developed electioneering instincts. Those who knew him intimately were of course aware that, in his earlier years, he was moved by a quite real passion for the betterment of the lot of the poor. But the House of Commons and the public had no means of arriving at a judgment of his actual or potential sincerity until the Boer War had proved that this politician, flexible and dexterous in the manner most to be suspected, had on one subject at least a strength of conviction enabling him to face ruin without a tremor And if on one subject, why not on another? By common accord Mr. George's Ministerial colleagues in the days of his greatness treated his part in the Boer War almost as if it were the early police-court incident in the life of a reformed character. His enemies, on the other hand, never tired themselves (whatever the case with their audience) in raking up this part of his past. Both were unwise. The more the public was reminded of these transactions the more it was inclined to give Mr. George credit for pluck and sincerity. He had opposed the majority of the nation when he believed it to be in the wrong. Could he be regarded merely as a schemer and flatterer when he and the majority of the nation happened to be in accord?

Such was the great gain in moral weight which Mr. George could set against some thirty months of incessant anxiety, considerable physical danger, and vast unpopularity. Yet at the beginning of the war it looked as if he were to lose all and gain nothing, as if he were to earn for ever the least desirable of all reputations—that of a politician seeking purely personal and party advantage from a great national emergency.

The outbreak of hostilities had divided the Liberal party into two hostile camps, between which flitted restless and timorous folk definitely committed to neither. On the one side were Lord Rosebery, Mr. Asquith, Mr. (afterwards Viscount) Haldane, Sir Edward (afterwards Viscount) Grey, and other 'Liberal Imperialists'; on the other a definitely 'Stop-the-war' faction, a strangely assorted body in which agnostic cynics like Mr. Henry Labouchere rubbed shoulders with the softer spirits of Nonconformity. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, on whom had fallen the ungrateful task of 'leading' a party which for the most part declined to be led, at first inclined to a middle course, with which Sir William Harcourt and Mr. Morley were in general agreement. Critical of the diplomacy leading up to the war, Sir Henry conceived that the Boer invasion of Natal made it impossible for those who were in the main sympathetic with the South African Republic to decline aid to the Government.

Mr. George at first took a line which, while it associated him with the Stop-the-War Group, was essentially his own. His first speech was not mainly concerned to attribute unnecessary aggressiveness to the Colonial Office or lack of scruple to its agents. It was not even a plea for a small and pastoral people, obstinate in their pride of race, who might be recommended to British magnanimity. It was, in its most salient passages, simply an appeal to party feeling and class prejudice. The bitterest references were made to the purely domestic conduct of the Government. By its Agricultural Relief Act and its Irish Local Government Act* it had, Mr. George declared, 'divided three millions of money among its own supporters,' and particularly among its supporters in the House of Lords. That House was a Chamber for which no native-born Briton had a right to vote, and therefore a far closer body than the Transvaal Volksraad, in respect of which Mr. Chamberlain was demanding electoral privileges for the Uitlander. That such a Government and such a Chamber should be 'spending millions to enforce a pure and honest administration in the Transvaal' was, he held, absurd and monstrous.

This irrelevant acidity explains much of the special

* See Chapter IV.

feeling against Mr. George. The war was popular, and none who withstood the tide of national feeling could expect much consideration. Yet the public did make certain rough distinctions, and it at once imparted a quite peculiar severity to its disapproval of Mr. George's attitude. He was denounced next day in *The Times* for his speech and his vote against the provision of money for the war. He was accused of wishing to 'leave British soldiers to be shot in South Africa.' Of course Mr. George wished no such thing; he would not have left our soldiers 'naked to their enemies,' but would presumably have got rid of the enemies by the simple process of making peace. In doing so, of course, he might conceivably have left the whole of South Africa to Paul Kruger, and on that count a quite reasonable indictment could have been framed against him. But some confusion of thought is pardonable. If Mr. Swinburne, in the seclusion of his Putney villa, could write of the Boers as 'hell-hounds foaming at the jaws,' it is not surprising that some one, in the bustle of Printing-house-square, should take up the first stick that came handy in order to chastise the audacious pro-Boer. Mr. George had invited a thunderbolt of some kind. If Jove smote him with the wrong one he at least had no great reason to complain.

When Parliament rose after its short sitting Mr. George proceeded to expound his peculiar evangel of peace to his fellow-Welshmen. At Carmarthen in November he declared that 'there was not a lyddite shell which burst on the African hills which did not carry away an Old Age Pension.' Indeed this 'early bad manner' teemed with appeals to self-interest and class feeling which merely enraged the people they were intended to seduce. The British masses, when profoundly moved, are little inclined to the arguments of Mammon, 'the least erected spirit that fell,' who in Milton's epic gave his counsel against war,

Admiring more
The richest of Heaven's pavement, trodden gold,
Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed
In vision beatific.

This unfortunate attitude, however, did not long endure. In a few weeks Mr. George, exalted by his own enthusiasm, and perhaps also conscious of the futility of such arguments, emitted an altogether higher note, from which, in spite of much personal bitterness, there was in future no grievous descent. His speech at Oxford in the first month of 1900 was elevated in diction and not ignoble in theme. The pedlar logic, if not entirely absent, was less crudely expressed; the ordinary Pacificist arguments were stated with an eloquence to be sought in vain elsewhere; and there was besides a quality of breadth and statesmanship in the speech which was henceforth to be peculiarly associated with Mr. George; it is to be found in no other Liberal opponent of the war.

In considering such change of tone, it is necessary to remember one thing in order to avoid an injustice to a statesman peculiarly liable to be misjudged. It would be simple to say that a cynical Welsh adventurer, finding himself on the wrong tack, suddenly put about and went on another course, hoping that, since he must in any case be unpopular, he would acquire a reputation for nobility and disinterestedness. But such things with such a man do not happen so. Apart from his enormous sensitiveness, for good and evil, to popular opinion, Mr. George was himself in the midst of a process of self-education. It was the first time he had been called upon to decide, in a position of some responsibility, or at least of some elevation, on more than a local or sectional issue. On questions of tactics, on minor matters of concrete business, his brain is quick, clear, and decisive; in great things he seems to act on inspiration rather than as the result of any conscious process of thought; and it often happens that in the uninspired intervals neither his views, nor the manner of their expression, are worthy of the occasion.

This appears to be the explanation of his failure in 1899. Faced suddenly with a tremendous fact, to which his instinct urged a certain attitude, he found inspiration lacking, while his unassisted reason groped round for arguments, and could find few but those which had served him often in smaller quarrels. At last the inspiration arrived, and thenceforward he was distinguished from the rest of the so-called pro-Boers by an outlook which was not Welsh, or English, or British, but wider even than European. It was an outlook exceedingly exasperating to his countrymen, but as time went on the average citizen was obliged to take it into account, simply because it represented the outlook of the non-British world. The English pro-Boers, concentrating on the supposed errors of Mr. Chamberlain, Sir Alfred Milner, Mr. Rhodes, and Dr. Jameson, were plainly beside the mark; was Paul Kruger without blemish; were all the other Boers without guile or warlike intent? Every unprejudiced person saw it was not so, and that the origin of the war was a very mixed matter. Mr. George, as the son of a small nation, perceived, so soon as he had collected his thoughts, that if any true indictment were to be framed against the British Government, it could not rest on counts manufactured out of Blue-books. Quite unconsciously he took almost precisely the line of an article contributed, in his capacity of candid friend, by M. Brunetière to an English review :—

> ‘ Que valent exactement les griefs des Boèrs? Et que valent ceux des Anglais? Quelle est l'origine de la guerre actuelle? Et de qui, de M. Chamberlain ou de M. Kruger, eût-il dépendu d'en épargner l'horreur au monde? Toutes ces questions, où je comprends très bien que les Anglais s'acharnent, interessent peu l'opinion francaise. L'opinion francaise ne veut voir et ne voit en effet qu'une chose : à la fin d'un siècle qui s'appellera dans l'histoire le siècle du réveil ou de la renaissance des nationalités, et, par conséquent, où le grand crime politique, le grand crime international, est détruire une nationalité, c'est ce que les Anglais n'ont pas craint d'entreprendre.'

Nationality in Wales being comparatively untouched by Imperialism, Mr. George was then well qualified to present this side of the case. Whilst the Englishman was quite ready, as a matter of patriotic duty, to fight for any Johannesburg adventurer who wrapped himself in a Union Jack, there were at least a good many in Wales, as well as three quarters of the population of Ireland, who took the Continental point of view, and sympathised with the Dutch just because they were fighting to remain Dutch. Mr. George was therefore the most intelligent mouthpiece of a real but little represented public, and whenever he spoke in this sense, his advocacy ceased to be merely clever and attained true dignity. His earlier tone was never sufficiently forgotten during the war to obtain him forgiveness; his later tone permitted him, on a calm review of the case, to be included among those who have braved the extreme of unpopularity in defence of a great principle. But in Wales, even during the war, though he might be hustled occasionally, as in his own constituency at Bangor, he could win applause when, emphasising the racial issue, he declared that 'Race is deeper than religion.'

In the far less friendly atmosphere of the House of Commons he could also maintain the cause of nationality against imperialism in words which did not lack nobility. The annexation of the Republics gave him a great opportunity. On July 25, 1900, he associated himself with a motion of censure moved by Sir Wilfrid Lawson:

> 'We went into the war' (he said) 'for equal rights; we are prosecuting it for annexation. . . . The Colonial Secretary said that a war in order to impose internal reforms on President Kruger would be an immoral war. If that be so I ask the right honourable gentleman or any of his friends to find an adjective sufficiently expressive of the character of a war entered on for the purpose of annexation. The right honourable gentleman admitted that we had no right to meddle in the affairs of the Transvaal, and that there was only one possible justification—that our motive was unselfish. We have thrown that justification away. It is exactly as if you had entered a man's house to protect the children

> and started to steal his plate. In changing the purpose of the war you have made a bad change. Our foreign critics say you are not going to war for equal rights, but to get hold of the gold-fields, and you have justified the criticism by this change.'

In this speech—which had not the countenance of the official Opposition—Mr. George shows for the first time the instinct of a statesman. It was the fashion of the moment to glory in our 'splendid isolation.' For suggesting that the goodwill of Europe was something to be considered Mr. George was called a traitor, but soon after the statesmen in office were entirely converted to his point of view, though their crude attempts to buy a measure of Continental friendship would, if not happily frustrated by events, have placed Great Britain in a far more humiliating position than that contemplated by the most infatuated pro-Boer. The country, however, was in no mood to listen to such arguments any more than to suggestions that the war might have been avoided. If the Boers were 'hell-hounds foaming at the jaws' the obvious thing was to shoot them, and not to inquire nicely into the original cause of hydrophobia. The only fact the public regarded was that Mr. George had spoken against victory, and that Mr. Chamberlain stood for a triumphant peace. There were in essence only two voices that rose above the confusion of tongues. The one was that of Joseph Chamberlain, in whom the war-spirit of the people was epitomised. Loud, fierce, relentless, he was heard from end to end of the Empire, and throughout Europe. The single significant interruption came, less loud but astonishingly shrill, from the member for Carnarvon Boroughs.

It needed high courage for a young and unestablished man to engage, night after night, an antagonist so formidable as Mr. Chamberlain in the height of his power and popularity. Even in the hour of final defeat, and with the shadow of his tragic breakdown on him, Mr. Chamberlain commanded a power of invective so ferocious as to shatter permanently the nerves of the softer kind of antagonist. In the Boer War days, conscious that he was the national idol as well as the dictator of the Cabinet, he was scarcely less wounding than Chatham; he could make proud men cringe and stout men quail almost at a gesture, and the effect of some of his speeches was almost that of a physical flogging. A giant's strength he used like a giant. Kindly in his private relations, he had as little chivalry as tenderness in dealing with political enemies, showed no hesitation in attributing to them the least worthy motives, and never shrank from inciting popular frenzy. Mr. George, who resembles him in so many ways, has shown something of the same incapacity for generosity to the fallen foe (unless it is quite certain that he can never rise), something of the same intolerance to criticism, and something of the same disposition to the methods of Mark Anthony. But the hard bitterness of Mr. Chamberlain forms no part of his character, and if any had dared to attack him at the height of his power they would have had little to apprehend except his mastery of weapons generally held legitimate. Yet, at the election of 1918, the fear of him was such that the very men who opposed almost apologised for doing so; and it was not until the Coalition fabric showed some considerable signs of wear that speakers either in Parliament or in the country found courage for a frontal assault. It is only when we remember how craven was the attitude of even distinguished statesmen during the height of Mr. George's popularity (which was also the period of his most questioned policy) that we can do due justice to the mere courage of that long-drawn-out duel with Mr. Chamberlain between 1900 and 1902. Mr. George was then exposed to every kind of risk—the risk of being killed with ridicule, of being beggared by loss of business, even of being torn to pieces by crowds exposed to what Mr. Balfour called an 'intolerable strain.'

Yet he never flinched. While Mr. Chamberlain lolled disdainful on the Treasury Bench, the young Welsh member below the gangway exhausted every resource of industry and artifice in the attack. An air of provincialism still clung to him. At no time gifted in the art of dress, he was in these days worse than careless, for he affected something of the anxious dandyism of the small town. The red rose which occasionally adorned his buttonhole served to accentuate the contrast between his homely appearance and the exaggerated spruceness of the Colonial Secretary. He wore his dark brown hair longer than custom sanctions; and even the noble head could not quite redeem his figure from the suggestion of the lesser middle class. But when he was on his feet the sheer force of his passion cancelled these peculiarities, while the looseness of much of his phrasing was forgotten in the music and emotional quality of a voice which, while never rising much above a conversational level, was capable of instantaneously adapting itself equally to biting invective, solemn appeal or reproof, or the most winning frankness.

The effect of these House of Commons speeches, however, was largely confined to the Chamber and the lobbies. While Mr. Lloyd George's reputation as a debater was continually rising at Westminster, the public knew of him chiefly as a rattling rough-and-tumble platform speaker. Few of his contributions to debate reached the newspapers except in the most fragmentary form, and those who would now find them must seek the impartial columns of Hansard. Elsewhere it was generally considered enough to say that he 'continued the debate.' Thus it was that the country at large hardly realised, when the war was over, how solid had been Mr. George's advance. Parliamentary animosities are apt to pass with the occasion, while any conspicuous display of ability makes a lasting impression. Long before good people in the country had ceased to think of the member for Carnarvon Boroughs as merely a more virulent, and less amusing, and less 'good form' Labouchere, he had been marked in the inner circle of politics as certain of high office whenever the Liberal Party returned to power.

The newspaper censorship had for long its effect on the public estimation of Mr. George's qualities. During many years, almost indeed until the second year of the Great War, there remained a widespread popular superstition that he was little but a man of words, a master of demagogic arts, incapable of taking a reasoned view of great questions. Such a belief, it is safe to say, would not have survived perusal of any tolerable reports of Parliamentary speeches during the Boer War—speeches which, though often violent, and sometimes disfigured with bitter personalities, were seldom deficient in sound argument, and often instinct with true statesmanship. Perhaps at no time, except for a short period during the Great War, did he speak so consistently well, with so much argumentative force and so little tawdriness in style.

At the end of the first year of the war Mr. George's prospects, making full allowance for whatever reputation he had gained, were black in the extreme. In the city his practice as a solicitor had alarmingly declined. The business of his firm was largely concerned with the affairs of limited companies, and as the City was perhaps the most fervidly patriotic spot in England, Mr. George's bad eminence as a pro-Boer reacted disastrously on all such patronage. His constituents murmured. There must have been times when stark ruin, political and personal, stared him in the face. But he had entered on a path which, while it might be ultimate destruction to follow, it was immediate undoing to retrace. It is only to the established great that inconsistency is admissible in the name of statesmanship. The beginner in demagogy can afford nothing so ill as moderation. As a private member, Mr. George, having attained unpopular notoriety, could only hope for safety by continuing to court it. It was better to risk ostracism, bankruptcy, lynching, than to go back. With unconquerable optimism Mr. George trusted to his star and went forward.

CHAPTER VI

The real crisis in Mr. George's career, as well as in the war, was over when the 'Khaki' Election took place in the autumn of 1900. Lord Roberts had entered Bloemfontein on March 13th; on June 5th the British flag had been hoisted at Pretoria. Kimberley, Ladysmith, Mafeking had been successively relieved. Most important of all, foreign opinion had been impressed by the change Roberts had brought on the scene, and the danger, once far from unreal, of a Continental Coalition, had receded. It was plain to the most hostile critic, as to a friendly observer like Captain Mahan, that the affair was now 'simply a question of endurance between combatants immeasurably unequal in resources.'

Naturally the country was in a less exasperated temper; if the pro-Boers were still unpopular, they were less virulently detested; and many, who regarded criticism as treason while the enemy was prospering, were now not indisposed to recognise a point of view other than the Government's. The thorough-going pro-Boers were, in fact, not the main sufferers by the election. Mr. Lloyd George enjoyed a personal triumph, defeating by a larger majority than in 1895 a genuine 'khaki' candidate, Colonel Platt; and the stop-the-war party as a whole almost held its own. The chief victims were the unfortunate Liberal Imperialists, the men who, like Sir Henry Fowler, had declared that war could only be avoided by 'trailing the British flag in the mire of dishonour.' For them there was little positive enthusiasm, while that part of the electorate which took its tone from Mr. Chamberlain scarcely distinguished between one kind of Liberal and another. Hard as the event might be to some honest men, voters could not be blamed. Those who wanted a certain thing felt the wisdom of going to the right shop for it. Those who wanted the opposite thing were equally resolved to go to the opposition shop. Thus Mr. Lloyd George enjoyed, with the drawbacks, the advantages of an unequivocal attitude. If he could survive at all, he must survive as a man of some mark. There were doubtless some of his friends who thought his opposition a piece of ruinous quixotry, while his enemies condemned it as mere criminal folly. But there was a third and juster view, which happened to be well expressed by an extraordinarily prescient writer in the *Daily Mail*, then in the first flush of its clever youth :—

'It matters little,' he wrote, with a detachment astonishing when we consider the temper of the time and the general tone of this particular paper, 'whether you arouse a storm of approbation or a whirlwind of abuse, so long as your individuality stirs men's passions to the depths. It is of small consequence whether you are a public idol or the detested of the masses, so long as the very mention of your name thrills men's emotions—the transition from villain to hero is but a small one on the political stage, one that the changing limelight of public opinion affects automatically.'

From this point of view to be burned in effigy side by side with Paul Kruger was much better than to be languidly commended by Mr. Balfour. But the foresight of this critic did not stop here. Instituting a daring comparison between Mr. Chamberlain and the man who was seen by the crowd as his antithesis, this acute observer (who signs himself 'M.') said :—

> 'The same clear, low-pitched cruel voice; the same keen incisive phrases; the same mordant bitterness; the same caustic sneer; the same sardonic humour; the same personal enmity. It is the very re-incarnation of the present Colonial Secretary in his younger days—a spectre of his dead self arisen to haunt him. A little more excited, you say, a trifle more violent in gesture, more impassioned in delivery; yes, more than Mr. Chamberlain now is, but . . . the very substance of his speech is a far away echo of a well-remembered eulogy of our present foes—Mr. Chamberlain's splendid advocacy of the Majuba compromise. Will time, that has had so mellowing an influence on the great Imperialist, work a

> similar change in the virulent Little Englander? Will he a score of years hence be the tower of strength of the Imperial or the Parochial party? None can say now, but that he will be by then one of the foremost men in the nation's Parliament is beyond question.'

So shrewd an observer clearly thought that, quite apart from the moral rights or wrongs of the question, Mr. George was not doing badly for himself.

His position was strengthened about this time by a powerful accession of journalistic support. Hitherto one of the greatest weaknesses of the pro-Boer party was the want of 'a good press.' Under the editorship of Mr. (afterwards Sir) E. T. Cook the *Daily News* had thrown its then considerable influence on the side of the war; and according to a contemporary 'the archangel Gabriel himself could not shake the conscience of Bouverie Street.' Mr. Cook was a rather uninspired and uninspiring editor, in whom immense industry strove hard to supply the defects of natural genius for his profession. But he was able, quite honest, and very obstinate, and no protests from his readers could either change or mitigate his imperialistic sentiments. The power of money was successfully invoked where no other argument could prevail. Mr. George was instrumental in interesting certain wealthy Quakers; the paper was bought; and Mr. Cook made way for an editor on whom the peace party could count. By singular good fortune the new proprietors discovered in a young Blackburn journalist, Mr. A. G. Gardiner, not only an able and enthusiastic exponent of their views, but a writer of exceptional grace, wit, and persuasiveness. For half a generation to come Mr. George, naturally a favourite of the paper which he virtually created, had much more than the advantage of being approved in decorous editorials. He was consistently presented as a hero by an artist in the picturesque.

The first session of the new Parliament was enlivened by what a Conservative opponent* (afterwards destined to be Mr. Lloyd George's subordinate) calls 'an exceedingly contemptible attack' on the Colonial Secretary. Mr. George moved an amendment to the Address declaring that 'Ministers of the Crown and members of either House of Parliament holding subordinate office ought to have no interest, direct or indirect, in any firm or company competing for contracts with the Crown.' With the general purport of this declaration there could, of course, be no disagreement, but its personal implications were hotly resented. Mr. Chamberlain's brother happened to be chairman of a firm called Kynochs Limited, which manufactured munitions of war, and Mr. George, dwelling on the family connection with this undertaking, developed the suggestion of 'indelicacy' which was afterwards to be put forward (to his own discomfort) in the 'Marconi affair.'

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* Sir A. Griffith Boscawen, 'Fourteen Years in Parliament.'

'I do not say,' he explained, 'that the Secretary for the Colonies or the Financial Secretary to the Treasury* has done anything to lower the standard of proud preeminence which we enjoy as a country in this matter. What I do say is that they have given legitimate grounds for uneasiness, and above all they have established precedents which, if they were followed, would lead to something infinitely worse than anything I have spoken of to-day.'

The incident was harmless to Mr. Chamberlain, for nobody was so absurd as to suppose that he had more than one idea in his head, and it is in truth difficult to conceive, in modern investment conditions, the possibility of every Minister being in such a position that neither he, nor any of his connections, is safe from the suggestion of interest of some kind in one of the numerous forms of activity which may derive benefit from war expenditure. But in many quarters Mr. George's action was approved on the principle, much more strongly held then than later, that in matters of this sort over-zeal is better than no zeal at all.

The second session of the khaki Parliament, occasioned by the death of Queen Victoria, was formal, but in the succeeding session, which opened in February, 1901, Mr. George gained immediate prominence by a form of attack which inflamed afresh public opinion against him. Hitherto he had been content to chastise the Government. Now he mauled the military heroes. Lord Kitchener's 'iron hand' was the subject of eloquent denunciation during the debate on the Address. Mr. George quoted a Canadian officer who described how 'we move from valley to valley, lifting cattle and sheep, burning and looting, and turning out women and children to weep in despair beside the ruin of their once beautiful homesteads.' He produced a proclamation by Lord Roberts declaring that 'should any damage be done to any lines of railway or public works, the houses and farms in the vicinity of the place where the damage is done will be destroyed, and the residents in the neighbourhood dealt with under martial law.' Mr. George fastened on the words 'residents in the neighbourhood.' Mere proximity was an offence; punishment might be extended to inoffensive persons solely because they lived near the spot where damage was done. The utility of terror as a military weapon had not yet dawned upon him, and the practice of 'reprisals,' to be carried later to such extremes under his own Government in Ireland, bore to him a strange and horrid aspect. It was certainly without hypocrisy that the politician who was afterwards to slur over the partial destruction of the city of Cork now held up to execration a proclamation issued by General Bruce Hamilton :—

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* Mr. Austen Chamberlain.

> 'Notice—the town of Venterburg has been cleared of supplies, and partly burnt, and the farms in the vicinity destroyed, on account of the frequent attacks on the railway in the neighbourhood. The Boer women and children who are left behind should apply to the Boer Commandants for food, who will supply them unless they wish to see them starve. No supplies will be sent from the railway to the town.'

'This man,' said Mr. George, referring to General Hamilton, 'is a brute and a disgrace to his uniform.' As to the British Army, it was 'jaded, worn, and broken.' The Colonial Secretary, Mr. George said, had appealed at the beginning of hostilities to the God of Battles. 'He has got his answer. It is not the one he anticipated, but it is sufficiently terrible in all conscience to make honourable members pause and reflect whether they dare go on with this business.'

Until this moment no critic of the war had gone so far in public speech. The immediate reply came in a singularly restrained reproof from a new member, Mr. Winston Churchill, fresh from South African adventures, who had a good word for the Boers, as well as for General Hamilton, and, while admitting unpleasant incidents, put forward the quaint plea that the Germans had done worse in 1870. The next day another new member, Mr. Andrew Bonar Law, remarked on the 'peculiar ability and the remarkable success of the way the honourable member (Mr. George) laid his baits for the applause of the gentlemen round him.' But however Mr. George might be detested by one class of critic, or suspected by another, he had made it clear that there was no advantage in being mealy-mouthed, and this speech had considerable effect in strengthening the courage of those who thought with him. They began to realise that there is nothing more futile than calm fanaticism, moderate frenzy, and respectable impropriety : and during the ensuing summer a sharper note was observable even on the part of the official Opposition. It was in June* that Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman made his famous declaration concerning 'methods of barbarism,' that Mr. Morley spoke of the non-Imperialist Liberals as in the 'main stream' of party thought, and that Sir William Harcourt inveighed bluntly against 'the gold gamblers of the Rand.' Clearly Mr. George had been leading his leaders. There were those who now looked forward to a re-birth of Liberalism, but in fact the cleavage was accentuated by these speeches.

When, a few days later, Mr. George moved the adjournment on the subject of concentration camps, and roundly charged the authorities with inflicting quite indefensible conditions on Boer women and children, who were dying at the rate of 450 per thousand, while the death-rate of troops in the field was only 52, the defence was in part undertaken by Mr. Haldane. The last chance of a restoration of Liberal solidarity seemed to be gone after the Queen's Hall meeting on June 19, when farewell was said to Mr. Sauer, a leading member of the Afrikander Bond, who had been touring Great Britain in the interests of peace, and (it was largely held) of Dutch supremacy in South Africa. A vast crowd surged angrily outside, singing 'Rule Britannia' and cheering for Mr. Cecil Rhodes, while somebody (with either a marked excess or a surprising deficiency of humour) called for a similar ovation for Mr. Alfred Beit and Mr. Albu. Mr. George, within, spoke on the text 'What shall it profit a nation if it annex the gold fields of the whole world and lose its own soul?' and thanked Heaven 'for the spectacle of one little nation of peasants standing against the mightiest Empire in the world.'

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* At a banquet presided over by Mr. Stanhope.

The buttons were now off the foils. The next day Mr. Asquith* replied to the pro-Boers, declaring that war had been forced on the country, and that South Africa must be freed from the 'corrupt tyranny' of the Kruger *régime*. Had Lord Rosebery at this moment definitely thrown in his lot with Mr. Asquith the split might well have proved irremediable. But, far from giving a sign, Lord Rosebery went out of his way to declare that he must 'plough his furrow alone,' and for a moment Mr. George seemed to entertain a fleeting hope that this agricultural enterprise might lead the noble Earl in the long run somewhere in the neighbourhood of one who, with all his crusading zeal, was a highly practical politician. It is at least significant that from this time his passion moderated. On July 4 he expressly dissociated himself in the House of Commons from the Queen's Hall resolution in favour of the restoration of Boer independence. A swift end to the war, and a self-governing South Africa, were now his two demands, and Lord Rosebery favoured both. Mr. George's plea for peace, put forward early in August, was anything but fanatical, and might almost be called opportunistically common sense. One of his arguments was, that with all our forces tied up in South Africa, we should be very awkwardly situated if the necessity arose elsewhere to 'defend the honour of the Empire.' 'Why do honourable members laugh?' he asked indignantly, as the Ministerial benches jeered. 'Do they think they have a monopoly of that sentiment?' He proceeded to argue that any incident might arise which would fatally test our weakness, and that peace should be made at once as a mere matter of prudence. The argument was, of course, by no means far-fetched. 'Incidents' had, indeed, already occurred, and their development had only been avoided by submission. The Government dared not stop the great traffic in arms, and at Germany's behest we had even abandoned our right of search at sea.

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* At a dinner of South Essex Liberals.

During the autumn, in a political progress through Scotland and Wales, Mr. George reverted to an earlier line of argument, now less likely to be heard with impatience, dwelling on the indefinite postponement of land and temperance legislation by the protraction of the war. 'It will never be finished,' he said at Edinburgh, 'until we have a statesman who has the courage first of all to find out the truth, in the next place to believe the truth, then to tell the truth, and finally to act on the truth. Not one of those qualifications is to be found in Mr. Chamberlain's statesmanship.'

At Carnarvon, referring to Lord Rosebery's expressed intention to put his own views into the 'common stock,' Mr. George declared that nobody was better qualified than the late Liberal Prime Minister to deal with the situation in South Africa, and his favourable opinion was strengthened by the famous 'clean slate' speech at Chesterfield, which, usually recalled as a lecture to Liberals, was in fact a bitter attack on Chamberlainism. As regarded South Africa, it proposed a 'regular peace' in lieu of 'unconditional surrender.' All this accorded with Mr. George's views, and when he went to Birmingham two days later he had in his pocket a speech that was very largely a panegyric of Lord Rosebery, whose liberality was contrasted with the attitude hitherto occupied by Mr. Asquith and Sir Edward Grey. To these politicians Mr. George had proposed to say in effect 'When I talked liberality and common sense you jeered and sneered; now that Lord Rosebery, from his high pedestal, talks exactly as I did, you find all he says very good.'

One passage in the speech is worth noting in view of later associations. 'There is one other service which Lord Rosebery has done in the interest of the fair and effective discussion of this great question. He has treated with scorn the doctrine of the infallibility of Lord Milner. I am not sure that this new dogma of papal infallibility is not the most serious obstacle in the path of the unity of Liberal action for the moment. Any suggestion that is made, whether by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman or anyone else, if Lord Milner does not approve, or if in any way it involves the slightest slur on him, is not even considered on its merits.'

Only a few lines of this speech were spoken. Birmingham, which made Mr. George a freeman in 1921, was anxious to make him either a cripple or a corpse twenty years earlier. At the time it was fashionable to talk of Mr. George's escape in a policeman's uniform as clear proof of a craven disposition. In fact his fine courage in facing a certain class of risk—perhaps the most completely admirable feature of his character—was never more signally illustrated than when he ventured within reach of the fury of the Birmingham mob, maddened as it was by the insult to its idol implied in the very presence of his chief assailant.

A telegram announcing the break up of the meeting was sent to Mr. Chamberlain: 'Lloyd George the traitor was not allowed to say a word; two hundred thousand citizens and others passed a unanimous vote of confidence in the Government and of admiration for your unique and fearless services for King and country.' The effect, however, was rather unfavourable than otherwise to the object of this adoration. Mr. Asquith was impelled to protest; the *Spectator* expressed 'disgust and indignation,' and from this moment the more chivalrous Conservatives, to whom the pluck of Mr. George could hardly fail to appeal, regarded him, if not with less hostility, at least with more respect. At his next public appearance* Mr. George was naturally bitter. 'Judas,' he said, 'only finished himself, but this man (Mr. Chamberlain) has finished thousands.' The main burden of the speech, however, was that Lord Rosebery would be welcomed back as leader of a united Liberal party. This idea he developed in an interview with an evening paper. 'If Lord Rosebery really becomes leader, and takes the country with him, we shall all be delighted, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman will be as pleased as anyone.' Sir Henry's thoughts must remain most vaguely conjectural. Mr. George's can be fairly accurately inferred. On Ireland and certain domestic questions he was certainly nearer the man of the lonely furrow than to his titular leader, and he may well have thought that as a counterpoise to Mr. Chamberlain Lord Rosebery was far more likely to take the country with him. Moreover, Mr. George had reason to suspect that even in relation to the war Sir Henry was leading nowhither.

This suspicion was confirmed by the official amendment to the Address at the beginning of the Session of 1902. This amendment, entrusted to Mr. Cawley, a Lancashire member of no special distinction, was, indeed, almost nonsensical. It blamed Ministers for pursuing a course not conducive to an early and durable peace, but pledged the party to 'support all proper measures for the effective prosecution of the war.' The two separate clauses were morally and logically destructive of each other, except on the formula of 'My country, right or wrong.' Against this ingenuous but scarcely ingenious attempt to make the best of both worlds Mr. George protested by going into the lobby with the Irish members, on a thorough-going amendment proposed by Mr. Dillon. Speaking on the Cawley amendment itself, he told Sir Henry that he had been induced to make a declaration which must prevent him in future being very enthusiastic in his opposition to the war:

> 'My right honourable friend has been captured, and I fear he has been treated by his captors as

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* At Bristol.

> the Boers treat their prisoners—he has been stripped of all his principles and left on the veldt to find his way back as best he can. . . . It is a mistake, even if it brings temporary popularity to the party, to pawn the heirlooms of Liberalism in order to buy off unpopularity. If we adopt the course laid down in the amendment we shall simply substitute for an unpopularity which is undeserved, so long as it comes from adhesion to a definite principle, a contempt which will be thoroughly well deserved.'

Mr. George might have modified his bitterness had he not still indulged the hope that Lord Rosebery would rescue the Liberals from such leading. But these hopes were finally dashed by Lord Rosebery's Liverpool speech in February. The abandonment of Home Rule might not have discouraged Mr. George, but there was nothing about land reform, or Welsh Disestablishment, or any of the causes in which the Welsh Radical was vividly interested. For such an exiled Monarch who should take the risks of a Monk? Mr. George turned from Lord Rosebery in much the same spirit of disillusionment that Bolingbroke flung away from the impracticable Pretender; henceforth Lord Rosebery could be only of æsthetic interest; a noble Primrose 'twas to him, and it was nothing more. As the lesser of two evils, Mr. George decided for loyalty to Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and for the remaining months of the war he proceeded on orthodox lines as the Government's sharpest critic and Mr. Chamberlain's most untiring foe. His last considerable speech was made on March 20. It was on this night that Mr. Chamberlain told Mr. Dillon he was a 'good judge of traitors' and that Mr. Dillon retorted that Mr. Chamberlain was 'a damned liar.' In a House seething with excitement Mr. George, referring to an announcement made earlier in the House, expressed surprise that our generals should have celebrated a 'victory' which was really a trivial affair of outposts, simply because it had been gained on the anniversary of Majuba. Since the war broke out, he said, British arms had suffered eighteen defeats of far greater magnitude than Majuba.

'And the pro-Boers rejoice at it,' exclaimed a Ministerial member. The point of the interruption was that the Nationalists had greeted with cheers the news of Lord Methuen's defeat, and it had been persistently but quite inaccurately stated that Mr. George, who sat with the Irish members, had taken part in this demonstration. Resentment of this slander doubled Mr. Lloyd George's vehemence in repudiating the charge of rejoicing in his country's defeats. Pale with anger, he cried, 'That is a most insolent remark,' and when later the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Brodrick,* declared that Mr. George 'seemed to be disappointed that there were not more disasters to gloat over,' he replied with something like passion 'That is untrue.' This last speech, though delivered in such stress of emotion, was really a quite reasonable appeal for peace and settlement on liberal terms which would not imply a vast military and bureaucratic establishment in South Africa. With responsible government, Mr. Lloyd George argued, appeasement might be expected. 'The war will have taught wisdom on both sides. We shall have no more ultimatums from the Boer side, and I do not believe we shall have any more Highbury picnic speeches from our side.'

When peace came a few weeks later the member for Carnarvon Boroughs was probably the most unpopular man in Great Britain. But he had won something more substantial than mere popularity; he had indelibly impressed himself on the imagination of his generation. On the pro-Boer side he towered like Satan, in

> . . . transcendent glory raised
> Above his fellows, with monarchal pride,
> Conscious of highest worth.

Among the Liberal Imperialists there were stately figures, but those who most admired them mingled approval with pity for the squalor of their associations.

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* Afterwards Lord Midleton.

Mr. George had little admiration, but he escaped the pity. It seemed then not very probable that Mr. Asquith or Sir Edward Grey would again find the 'main current' of Liberal opinion, and humane Conservatives were not unwilling to see them, after due penance, serve in minor posts in Heaven. Mr. George, it was generally assumed, would reign in Hell, and glory in that bad eminence.

The war had given him not only a passion and an opportunity but a hobby. His old interest in matters military had been quickened by the campaign. A sympathetic biographer* recalls that he developed 'most uncanny military skill' and 'would prophesy with the most remarkable astuteness the next move of the generals on either side.' As some at least of the British moves were purely involuntary, such foresight was in truth little short of miraculous. It is, however, interesting to note that thus early questions of strategy exercised a powerful fascination over the mind of one who was so long to be considered the typical Pacificist.

Mr. George aged rapidly during these years of intense strain. At the beginning of the war he had not a grey hair, and his face still retained much of the freshness of youth. But long before the struggle was over there had come a whiteness at the temples, and the broad forehead was already deeply corrugated by that arrangement of lines, half good-naturedly quizzical, half alertly interrogative, which at once seizes the eye of the caricaturist. There was little trace, except in the gay and still boyish laugh, of the careless lad of the Llanystumdwy days. Indeed, until the new century had advanced some years, Mr. George's anxieties remained so formidable that he had need of all his natural elasticity of spirit. He had manifestly arrived. But it was like an arrival at a Continental railway terminus. Some time was to elapse before he could get his luggage through the Customs House and exchange the dust and worry of the Station of the Holy Lazarus for the comfort and cleanliness of the Elysian Fields and the Hotel Dives.

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* Mr. Harold Spender.

CHAPTER VII

There is a sense of anti-climax in turning from the clash of foreign war to the mumblings of the domestic controversy to which Mr. George immediately directed his energies. Yet, if the Boer War firmly established him as a public figure, the Education Bill of 1902 contributed more than anything to make unchallengeable his claim to Ministerial place, while it was at the same time a prime factor in hastening the day of his preferment.

The pen of a great political satirist might profitably be employed in tracing the story of this measure. The Bill, which produced the most important political results, without its authors being in the least aware of the forces they were freeing, sprang from the brain of the late Sir Robert Morant, who in far Siam had practised bureaucratic methods which (on promotion to Whitehall) he considered highly applicable to the natives of this country. The Empire has no religion, and though to Sir Robert as a man one creed might be specially true, to him as an official all (to vary the Gibbonian phrase) were equally a nuisance. His object was the best secular education, and he had little patience with people whose consciences got in the way of this ideal. Considering the old School Boards ineffective, he proposed to transfer their powers to the Borough and County Councils, to link up schools of all grades, and (with a sole view to increased efficiency) to extend rate aid to denominational schools, which had so far existed precariously on voluntary contributions, supplemented by grants from the Exchequer.

Mr. Balfour was pleased with the plan, which also gratified the Liberal Mr. Haldane, whose mind worked on much the same lines as Sir Robert Morant's. But Mr. Balfour was not only a highly intelligent man genuinely interested in education; he was also head of the Conservative party, and the Church had a certain claim in him. So he slipped into a Bill which was primarily a measure of bureaucratic concentration a few clauses which he deemed due to the Church. In these, of course, Sir Robert Morant had no manner of interest; but it was wholly around them that the trouble was to rage. That Mr. Chamberlain, Unitarian, anti-clerical, and an excellent tactician, should have given assent to a Bill which he was afterwards to deplore as the cause of the gravest electoral trouble is remarkable. But Mr. Chamberlain rarely thought of more than one thing at one time, and he was then wholly occupied with anticipations of an early and triumphant peace. Thus he readily gave what must have been a thoughtless assent to the Bill, and indeed told his constituents that he would stand or fall by it.

The debate was carried on by minorities on both sides. Many Liberals secretly favoured the Bill, and though Mr. Haldane would not vote for it, he commended it openly, declaring many of its provisions to be quite German in their excellence. The real leadership of the Opposition was left to Mr. George; on the other side Lord Hugh Cecil and Mr. Dillon said all the things that would normally come from the Treasury Bench. The Education Bill debate was thus a soldiers' battle, a kind of political Fontenoy, and all the credit of Liberal opposition naturally and deservedly accrued to Mr. George.

The quarrel centred on rate aid to denominational schools. The Government maintained that as Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Jews, and others had made great sacrifices to keep up their schools it would be iniquitous now to deprive them of their special character. On the other hand it was plain that the voluntary system, backed by Government grants, could no longer keep pace with the fresh demands constantly made on it in the sacred name of efficiency. Rate-aid was therefore adopted as the remedy for 'intolerable strain.' The Nonconformists (who had few voluntary schools) objected. It was monstrous, in their view, that the ratepayers' money should be used, in the words of Mr. George*, for 'teaching religion of which a large section of the ratepayers do not approve.' They objected incidentally to control of education being vested in Committees not directly elected. But the main fight was over the single question of rate-aid.

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* Speech on the Second Reading debate, May 8, 1902.

Mr. George, with his usual eye to tactical effect, kept the point well in the foreground. Mr. Haldane had deplored the clamour about religious teaching, and, in the interests of efficiency, had advised that discussion should be concentrated on the authority that should control the schools. Mr. George would have none of it. 'I cannot,' he said, 'comprehend why Mr. Haldane said that the authority was everything, and advised Nonconformists not to mind these religious squabbles. You cannot base any system of education on an injustice to a large section of the community. . . . My hon. friend seems always to be above the snow-line. His counsel was very serene in its purity, but rather sterile. Let him descend from the region of eternal snow and come down to bare facts, and he will find that things are not so easy to settle as they seem.'

The feelings of the Nonconformists were, indeed, sufficient to bewilder the Hegelian philosopher. It had been argued from the Conservative benches that as Churchmen, Roman Catholics and Jews were rated for the Board Schools, where sectarian religion was not supposed to be taught, it could not be called unfair to rate Dissenters for Church, Roman Catholic, and Jewish Schools. Mr. George quickly retorted that Board Schools were not Nonconformist Schools; a majority of their teachers had been Churchmen. 'Is the Bible,' he asked, 'a Nonconformist Book? It is not for me to repudiate the suggestion, but we do not claim a monopoly in it.'

Finally he turned on the Irish, who had joined in this issue their old Conservative foes, with a threat. Why, he asked, had the Liberals been for so long in a minority?

> 'It is because we committed ourselves to the cause of Ireland. . . . It is rather hard. In 1886 we threw over our most cherished leaders, Spurgeon and Bright, Dr. Allan, Dr. Dale, and even Mr. Chamberlain. We threw them over for one reason only; because we felt that it was

> due to Ireland; and it is rather hard, if they will forgive me for speaking candidly, to be put in this plight of being beaten down for the cause of Ireland, and that Irishmen, of all people, should then help our foes and theirs to make our defeat the more intolerable. . . . Who are the people who are hit by the Bill? The people of Wales. We were offered by Mr. Chamberlain disestablishment if we would throw over Home Rule. We did not do it, and some of the men who declined to do it will be sold up for rates under this Bill, and probably imprisoned under the *mandamus* of this Bill. They will remember that the instrument under which that happened was forged partly by the Irish members.'

The Irish obdurately disregarded this hint. For a moment, however, it seemed that peace might be made through that natural tendency for fanatics on one side to sympathise with fanatics on the other rather than with the calmly reasonable people on any side. Lord Hugh Cecil, the eloquent representative of the Church, expressed a preference for 'red-hot enemies' like Dr. Clifford, as against people of 'cool views' like Mr. Haldane, and when the Bill came into Committee it looked for a moment as if extremes might meet. Lord Hugh suggested that the difficulty might be surmounted by allowing 'different religious teachers to enter the schools and teach their different beliefs.' Mr. George at first appeared to welcome this suggestion, but afterwards saw difficulties. 'We should have hundreds of little theological Fashodas,' he picturesquely put it. 'At one time a child would belong to one sect, and in a week or a fortnight there would be a successful Jameson raid. It is not a question of superior dogmas; it is a question of superior buns.' On the other side Mr. Balfour hastily directed a stream of cold water on his kinsman's proposal, declaring that he 'looked with terror on the vista opened up.' Entry of one Minister of religion was giving him enough trouble. What would happen if every old priest were supplemented by a dozen new presbyters?

On the third reading Mr. George ended thus an eloquent denunciation of the Bill :—

> 'Give the children the Bible if you want to teach them the Christian faith. Let it be expounded to them by its Founder. Stop this brawling of priests in and around the schools, so that the children may hear Him speak to them in His own words. I appeal to the House of Commons now, at the eleventh hour, to use its great influence and lift its commanding voice and say "Pray, silence for the Master."'

During the debate Mr. George had returned with some zest to his old sport of Bishop-baiting. Once upon a time he had called the Bishop of St. Asaph 'the yahoo of controversy.' Milder now, he could still denounce the Bishops as 'ecclesiastical Shylocks' and representatives of the 'snobbery' from which 'the Carpenter's Son had suffered.' But it is only right to say that in general dexterity rather than violence was the feature of his conduct of the Nonconformist case. Mr. Balfour, while regretting 'a certain class of observation,' added justly and generously that he had approved himself 'an eminent Parliamentarian'; and as the contest proceeded there were unequivocal signs of the increased consideration he commanded from the Liberal elder statesmen. For the first time Mr. Asquith began to send him notes, while Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman from this period accorded him almost the deference due to an established power. He discovered an infallible instinct for the right moment to intervene in debate, and skilfully avoided, even in his most deeply meditated efforts, the effect of a set harangue. A few notes jotted down with a stubby pencil on a few odd scraps of paper were his only visible dependence. This improvisation may have made for diffuseness, but what was lost in concentration was gained in vitality and effervescence; when there was not a sting there was always at least a sparkle, and he often made his best points from some passing incident, a cough, a jeer, an interruption, an entrance or an exit, which gave an opening for lively banter or sudden solemnity.

The 'passive resistance' following the passage of the Bill brought Mr. George into close co-operation with many who had bitterly opposed him during the war. At Lincoln he fraternised with Mr. (afterwards Sir Robert) Perks, the Imperialistic Wesleyan. At Queen's Hall Lord Rosebery showed him marked affability. While giving little positive encouragement to the passive resistance movement in England, as likely to end in embarrassing a Liberal Government, he became the idol of the Free Churches, and in Wales he adroitly made the Education Act a means of strengthening his hold on the people.

To defeat the objects of the Bill in the Principality he put forward a scheme so dexterously lawyerlike that the House of Commons had to be invoked to bring it to naught. His advice to the Welsh Councils charged with administration of the Act was that they should 'administer the loopholes.' In the old days the inspectors had taken into consideration the poverty of the Voluntary Schools and had been content with very moderate efficiency. Let the Councils, said Mr. Lloyd George, follow their example. Let the schools be maintained at their old level, without recourse to the rates. Then, if they will not agree to religious equality and popular control, we shall be able to condemn them as inadequate and insanitary and prevent them receiving even the aid of the Exchequer.

This plan of starving the Church Schools into submission miscarried, through excess of zeal on the part of the Carmarthenshire County Council, which, in a fit of fury, declined to touch the Act at all. At once the Government introduced a measure, popularly known as the Welsh Coercion Bill, to compel the Councils to reason, by empowering the Board of Education to make the necessary outlays, recovering the money from the local authority. The Bill was furiously opposed by Mr. George, who said Mr. Balfour had 'prescribed only on episcopal gossip from one of the Welsh Bishops who had bullied, intrigued and pulled the wires.' It was 'the cowardly Bill of a craven Government.'

During Committee Mr. Balfour adopted a severe form of closure. Despite protests the Speaker put the question, and the doors were closed, but Mr. George still protested, and with Mr. McKenna and a number of Welsh members he refused to leave the Chamber. 'You have made it impossible for us,' he said, 'to discuss this thing, and we cannot, consistently with our sense of duty, take further part in the farce of this Parliamentary session.' In the days of Mr. Chaplin's Agricultural Rates Bill* Mr. George had defied the chair at a similar crisis, but he had then been an almost solitary rebel. It was significant of his altered position that the whole Liberal party was now ready to support him. A few whispered words to Mr. Asquith, who was temporarily leading the Opposition, and the latter, while declaring that a scene must be avoided, announced that the rest of the party would follow Mr. George and take no further part in the debate. A few moments later only two or three members remained on the Opposition Benches; the Government played the rest of its farce to empty Benches, and Wales was coerced on paper.

The next day *The Times*, by the tone of its rebuke, showed its sense of the increased status of the delinquent. Mr. George, it said, was now 'a serious politician and a serious claimant for high office,' and these 'methods of self-advertisement' might be inconvenient to him hereafter. He was organising Welsh revolt; what would he say if, when himself in office, any section of the future Opposition that felt aggrieved by his measures sets itself to organise a general strike? 'Perhaps in that event he will sometimes be heard to lament that he himself set so evil an example, that he condescended to become the chorus leader of rebellion.'

Here was rebuke coupled with recognition, and the recognition was more important than the rebuke. The power of *The Times* was great politically, and especially because its leading columns were eagerly watched by the conductors of more popular papers, which now hastened to treat Mr. Lloyd George with a respect hitherto lacking. For the rest the Welsh were never coerced in practice. Mr. George may have indulged in picturesque exaggeration when he declared that 'there was an uprising of the people as had never been seen since the days of Llewellyn,' but national feeling sufficed at least to baffle a weak and perplexed Government.

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* See Chapter IV.

The English Dissenters, less powerful, could take revenge only by shedding their political principles with their cake-baskets. While the auctioneers made free with their knick-knacks, sold to pay the refused rates, the Nonconformists sullenly renounced their allegiance. 'Our Reports,' wrote Mr. Chamberlain, 'are as black as night.'* He was right to be 'most gloomy.' Nonconformists left the Liberal Unionist party by thousands, and their secession was largely responsible for the disaster of 1906. This bitter resentment, however, is something of a psychological puzzle. Superficially there seems no more justification for a citizen objecting to contribute to the support of a school in which there is Church teaching than for a gaol in which there is a Church service. He may have no personal use for the school. But only a very small percentage of the population has any personal use for the gaol. The case, however, went far beyond this. For years Free Churchmen had contributed without protest through the taxes to the support of Church schools. It was only when rates were applied for the same purpose that they revolted. 'How,' asked Mr. Haldane, the scandalised philosopher, 'can there be a conscience about rates and none about taxes?' Mr. George explained but did not altogether elucidate. 'The people,' he said, 'did not think taxes came from their own pockets. . . . The Government . . . was a sort of Providence to which the people felt they contributed nothing. . . . Taxation is something that droppeth as the gentle rain from Heaven.'†

This ingenuous remark is not without a certain significance. The superstition which Mr. George attributed to 'the people' seems in some measure to have affected himself even when wielding the 'spigot of taxation.' For many years he apparently nourished the belief that a high income-tax is little but a sort of massage for the financially over-nourished, highly salutary for them, and hurting nobody else.

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* To Sir Henry James, 'Life of the Duke of Devonshire'—Bernard Holland.

† Speech at Aberystwith, 1903.

If his part in the Education Bill dispute established for Mr. George an incontestable claim for some sort of place in the next Liberal Administration, the Tariff Reform controversy rather limited than advanced his pretensions to great office. As late as the middle of 1904 it was possible for a highly intelligent and well-informed Radical writer to assign him an appointment—that of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—inferior to those indicated for Mr. Herbert Gladstone, Mr. Sidney Buxton, and even Mr. John Burns.

In truth Mr. George, though zealous, was an exceedingly bad advocate in the Free Trade issue then dominant. His was eminently a defensive brief, and in defence he rarely shines. The Cobdenite faith was on its trial. It was charged by the Tariff Reformers with having brought Great Britain to a sorry state—iron gone, cotton going, and the rest of it. Obviously, the easiest way to secure acquittal was to smash the indictment, count by count, and this Mr. Asquith did in brilliant King's Counsel fashion; he was the hero of the whole business on the Free Trade side. Mr. Lloyd George, on the other hand, was as much an embarrassment as the over-willing witness—he was constantly proving too much. His business was to say that, while pretty comfortable now, we should be in a miserable state if Mr. Chamberlain had his way. Instead he vehemently contended that we were in a most miserable state already. His business was to say that Free Trade already more than sufficed to provide all necessary revenue, and that there was no necessity for 'broadening the basis' of taxation. He actually proposed to broaden the basis, not by duties on corn or foreign manufactured goods, but by putting new burdens on the landowners, a curious way, incidentally, of binding with hoops of steel such Free Trade Allies as the Duke of Devonshire and Sir Michael Hicks-Beach. Mr. Asquith, with *laissez faire* in the marrow of his bones, involved the Tariff Reformers in intellectual entanglements, a sort of *retiarius* of the wet blanket. Mr. Churchill was an active skirmisher about the arena, ready to finish off cripples with his young sword. For the most part Mr. George could only play the part of the jesting spectator whose jeers betray ignorance of the technique of the business in hand.

For the Cobdenite faith was not really in him: he was not logical enough, consistent enough, defined and limited enough. In 1896 he had played with the idea of preferential trade in the matter of tea duties. It may have been a jest, but the orthodox Free Trader is not thus gamesome. Moreover, being fundamentally uninterested, Mr. George lacked his usual perception. He confused the new Protection with the old, a purely modern importation, half Prussian, half Colonial, with the old-English clinging to use and wont. Thus at Oldham, in the autumn of 1903, he said:—

> 'Mr. Chamberlain has appealed to the workmen, and there were very fine specimens of the British workman on his platform. There were three Dukes, two Marquesses, three or four Earls. They had gone to help the workmen to tax his own bread. The Corn Laws meant high rents for them, and when a statesman of Mr. Chamberlain's position comes forward and proposes a return to the old Corn Law days, lords and dukes and earls and squires all come clucking towards him like a flock of fowls when they hear the corn shaken in the bin.'

Except on the principle that any rope is good enough for a pirate, the taunt was ill chosen. It suggested that Mr. Chamberlain was going to do something for the land, whereas perhaps the weakest point about the scheme of the neo-Protectionists was that it would even discourage British agriculture. But it is idle thus to criticise one who is less a political thinker than an artist using politics as his medium, with the defects as well as the virtues of his temperament. Mr. George, it may be assumed, was frankly wearied by the whole business.

He could jest prettily over Mr. Balfour's difficulties—his Cabinet 'like a worm, cut in two and both ends wriggling.' He could compare Mr. Austen Chamberlain to Casabianca, bravely sinking with the ship on his father's orders. He could contrast the faithful disciples of Birmingham, 'finished articles,' with Mr. Balfour's followers, who were 'partly manufactured goods.' He could admirably parody Mr. Chamberlain's jeremiad at the beginning of 1905—'Everything going; the Empire going—iron and steel and cotton and pearl buttons. Everything is going except the Government, and that won't go.' Nobody, in short, could more enjoyingly tie a cracker on to Mr. Chamberlain's coat-tails. But when he got hold of a pistol he was just as dangerous as an American boy on the Fourth of July; his friends were lucky if they did not get a share of the charge. Take, for example, his speech in Staffordshire, on the subject of increasing home production—

> 'I will tell you how I would do it. I would have better land laws. I would give security of tenure and fair rent, so that people might put all they could into the land with confidence. I would have cheap transit, for it ought not to cost as much and more to carry goods from one part of the United Kingdom to another as it costs to transport them across the ocean to New York.'

After all, if the State was to interfere with tenure and rent, why should it not interfere to stop dumping? And how could it decree 'cheap transit' without contravening the laws which Free Traders held to be applicable to every form of enterprise? If the railway companies charged more for carrying a packet from Harwich to Colchester than from Antwerp to London, the Free Trader assumed a very good reason; and he would have been even better pleased if it cost only a penny a ton to move wheat from Winnipeg to the English mill, even though the charge for a forty miles inland journey were a thousand times as much. Mr. George has never felt like this. Something combative in him has found a certain cowardice in *laissez faire*; something soft has revolted against its apparent inhumanity; something shrewdly shallow and small-tradesmanlike has made him sceptical of the paradox that competitors may be partners; something restless and busybody, a love of direction for direction's sake, a passion for 'doing something' without rightly apprehending the remoter consequences, made it impossible for him to be a consistent Free Trader. On the other hand, Protection was associated in his mind with the hated land-owner, and with most of the things he had learned, under his uncle's influence, to dislike. The shock of these opposite forces produced a singular confusion, and constantly, in attacking the enemy, he spoiled the arguments of his friends. 'You cannot feed the hungry with statistics,' he retorted to Mr. Chamberlain's singular jugglings with figures that acted as rebellious snakes might to an inefficient charmer, and were constantly curling round to bite the magician. But the retort was not the appropriate one. It was a very important part of the Free Trade argument that there were no hungry people (to speak of) since Cobden gave them cheap bread.

A very different controversy gave more appropriate employment for Mr. Lloyd George's powers of amusing invective. The 'Chinese slavery' debates enabled him, moreover, to justify much that had given offence during the war. Condemnation has been heaped, Ossa on Pelion, concerning the 'discreditable party fraud' implied in the outcry as to indentured yellow labour, but, whatever may be said of the politicians, there are now few who would deny that the crowd was right from every point of view in its objection to the Chinese experiment. Mr. Chamberlain, who, against his private feelings, was led to support the policy introduced by his successor at the Colonial Office, was described by Mr. Lloyd George as having 'nailed the yellow flag to the mast of Protection.' Mr. George's attitude on this question was the subject of lively attack, especially by Mr. F. E. Smith,* for years afterwards. It was recalled that he had said to a Welsh audience: 'What would they say to introducing Chinamen at 1s. a day into the Welsh Collieries? Slavery on the hills of Wales! Heaven forgive him for the suggestion!' But though this might be effective in showing that Mr. George was one man speaking English in the House of Commons, and quite another speaking Welsh in Wales, it proved no great obliquity. At any rate, whatever injury Mr. George may have done to his general reputation, he strengthened his position with the English working-classes, which had not hitherto greatly taken to him; the English working-man has little sectarian feeling, and cannot get excited over theological quarrels. But Mr. George's part in the Chinese controversy was after all a minor one; leadership was shared by an incongruous group, Major Seely, the ex-Unionist, Mr. John Burns, and Mr. Herbert Samuel. Indeed, apart from the rather specialist splendours of the Education fight, the years between the end of the Boer War and the defeat of Mr. Balfour's Government saw Mr. George obscured, not only by the considerable men he later eclipsed, but by more than one sheer mediocrity. The mind of the country was absorbed in the Tariff Reform controversy; what part of its thoughts could be spared from Preference and Retaliation were engaged by considerable foreign affairs, and on neither set of subjects was Mr. George at his best.

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* Afterwards Lord Birkenhead and Lord Chancellor in the Coalition Ministry.

There were also, perhaps, more personal reasons for this comparative want of progress. The practice in the city had to be restored; years of bad business had to be made good; now assured that he was bound to be somebody, he could pay attention to matters more urgent than the 'little more,' however much it might be, in reputation. Moreover, a certain degree of lassitude was probably only prudential. Never sparing himself when the occasion justifies, Mr. George has consistently avoided the mistake of the man who so exhausts himself in winning a prize that he cannot enjoy or use it. His extraordinary resilience is attributable not only to a sound constitution, but to his habit of sparing himself wherever possible, of carrying economy of exertion to the extreme, and withdrawing to complete relaxation when the limit of endurance has been reached.

He had thus retired to Italy, recruiting from a slight indisposition, when Mr. Balfour resigned. Returning to London on December 19th, he entered the Government on the same day that his old acquaintance, Mr. John Burns, congratulated Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman on making the most popular of all possible appointments.

For some years the two had gone home together from Victoria to Clapham Junction, and there was always a certain competition to share the carriage in which they travelled, since the company was sure to be entertained with a frank discussion of the incidents of the night's sitting. It is not a little singular to recall that Mr. John Burns was then, in the popular eye (and indeed in the opinion of most politicians) the more important figure, with the brighter chances of a great career. On one occasion, running to catch a train, the pair were noticed by a group of working-men.

'There goes the Battersea cough-drop,' said one—for by that extraordinary title Mr. Burns (who hotly resented it, and on one occasion expressed his disapprobation in highly practical fashion) was then often distinguished.

'Burns? I saw him, of course,' said another, 'But who's the man with the bag?'

'That?—That's John's Private Secretary,' was the reply.

This incident had a certain significance. Mr. Lloyd George had long been a celebrity everywhere, and a popular hero in Wales. He had not so far reached quite that point in England; perhaps even in the height of his glory he never attained it. At any rate it is noteworthy that he has failed to achieve that indubitable certificate of true popularity—a nickname.

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. George had his choice between the Postmastership and the Presidency of the Board of Trade. Secretly disappointed—for he had hoped for the Home Office*—he accepted the latter because, though it carried the lower salary, it afforded better prospects of promotion. Often compelled to short views in personal as well as public matters, Mr. George has never lacked, when unembarrassed, the capacity to see well ahead.

Seeking as a Cabinet Minister the renewal of the confidence of Carnarvon Boroughs, he could, for the first time—with a majority of over twelve hundred—tell himself that his seat was safe. The Education Act had done its work in Wales, for not a single Unionist was returned.

It is notable that Mr. George's election speeches were distinctly moderate. There were no suggestions of a new heaven and earth; instead, he went so far as to declare that there must as yet be no dreams even of Old Age Pensions. 'Thrift, Horatio, thrift.' An unheard of victory had been gained by mere negatives; the democratic Cerberus, with one set of teeth well into the Tariff Reformers, was too pre-occupied to demand sops from the Free Traders. Why then spend good money for nothing, at the risk of offence to a class which Mr. George understood even better than 'the people'—namely, the little bourgeoisie of the country towns?

Never has Mr. George been so sober and unadventurous as at this period. Perhaps the new Minister was influenced—every recruit must be in some degree—by mere office; official chairs, fires, and carpets, the unruffled calm of a great routine, the polite scepticism of men who have seen Minister come and Minister go while they carry on imperturbably—all this for a time makes tame and humble the heyday in the blood of the fiercest innovator. But if the Board of Trade had a sobering effect, even more was the aspect of the House of Commons calculated to discourage any unnecessary departure from a strict respectability. Nonconformity had its St. Martin's summer in those days, and the last of the Puritans sat in serried ranks behind the President of the Board of Trade,—men whose names, perhaps not vividly remembered at Westminster, are carved on innumerable foundation stones in the country. Mr. George has a marvellous knack of catching the tone even of a momentary environment, and the tone of the Campbell-Bannerman Parliament, despite the presence of the new Labour Party, was safe middle-class respectability. Mr. Churchill might find it hard always to tune his tongue to the drone of the chapel harmonium. Mr. George, with no inconvenient ancestors, experienced little difficulty in rivalling the perfect decorum of Mr. John Burns.

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* Mr. Hugh Edwards, M.P., 'D. Lloyd George.'

There was thus no impediment to the rapid manufacture of a new legend. The irresponsible demagogue was now revealed as the eminently moderate man of affairs; the master of savage invective as a 'king of smiles.' Mr. George's Ministerial deportment was perfect. He made himself accessible, took especial pains to conciliate men of hostile political opinions, treated inquirers in the House with a winning politeness to which they were quite unaccustomed, and displayed an engaging modesty, almost shyness, in piquant contrast with his audacity in opposition. It was noticed that he rarely stood by the brass-bound box which Ministers thump to emphasise their points, and that a considerable time elapsed before he took liberties of any kind with the furniture or exposed the soles of his boots after the hardened Front Bench manner. Even to the attendants at the House he seemed to make a point of showing that office had not inflated. 'During thirty years,' an old servant of the Faithful Commons once declared, 'I have only known one member whose manner and way of speaking did not change after becoming a Minister. That one is Mr. Lloyd George.'

A rather partial biographer,* remarking on Mr. George's skill in negotiation, contrasts his methods

* Mr. Harold Spender.

Photo.] *[Elliott & Fry.*

Mr. Lloyd George as President of the Local Government Board (1905-8).

with those of his predecessors. They, acting in the 'bureaucratic spirit of the olden days,' had been 'accustomed to frame Bills without consulting the interests concerned.' Mr. George 'changed all that.' It is not, of course, true that at any time Ministers acted without ascertaining from expert sources the probable effect of their measures. But it is quite true that Mr. George got into much more intimate touch with the 'interests concerned' than had ever been the rule. His method is well illustrated in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1906. Before the Bill was even produced Mr. George called into consultation the ship-owners and the seamen's representatives. The point at issue was the load-line which Samuel Plimsoll had years before won for British sailors. From the owners' point of view the load-line put British ships at a disadvantage; foreign vessels, using our ports, were enabled, while our own ships were forbidden, to carry dangerously heavy cargoes, and could thus underbid in freights. Mr. George's measure, it was claimed, put the matter right without sacrificing the interests of the seaman. The British load-line was slightly modified, but no foreign vessel was allowed to enter our ports without conforming to this amended standard. All the 'interests concerned' were satisfied. The safety of the sailor was not jeopardised, the owner was given protection against the foreigner, the humanitarian could even rejoice that sailors under other flags were benefited. Thus it was natural that Mr. George should receive general congratulation.

To cool observers, however, it was clear that the precedent was capable of dangerous extension, and in fact it has been extended to the decided detriment of the general public. Every pushing and efficient Minister thought it necessary to copy Mr. George, and it became at last almost a maxim of government that 'settlement' is achieved when a compromise has been reached between the rival claims of 'interests' which may be, and generally are, wholly careless of the welfare of the community.

It is not easy to see how some of Mr. George's measures as President of the Board of Trade passed the censorship of the intellectuals of a specially Free Trade Government. It is less hard to understand that a certain kindness should have existed between him and the Tariff Reformers. When in 1907 he introduced the Patents and Designs Bill, he was complimented by Mr. Austen Chamberlain on being already 'far on the path' to Tariff Reform, while Mr. Bonar Law declared that the measure sapped 'the foundation on which the whole of our fiscal system is based.' By this Act it was ordained that a patent could be revoked if, four years after it had been granted, the patented article was being manufactured 'exclusively or mainly outside the United Kingdom.' The Act is said to have worked well. Patents previously worked abroad have since been worked at home. But from the true Free Trader's point of view such interference with the untrammelled operation of economic law can never be justified. The astonishing thing is not that Mr. George conceived this Act, for he has never been a true Free Trader, any more than he has been a true Little Englander—he was never more than a Little Welshman—but that a Cabinet elected to safeguard Cobdenic principles should have permitted such a betrayal of all that Cobden stood for. For Cobden would have argued that if patents were worked abroad it must be because foreign processes were cheaper or better, and that any profit to British manufacturers, or employment to British workmen, resulting from restrictive legislation, would be far more than off-set by loss to the nation as a whole.

For a time Mr. George was more admired on the Opposition benches than by his fellow Ministers, who failed to relish his dislike of 'humdrum Liberalism,' and his sensitive pride was deeply wounded by the attitude of certain grandees of the party, who failed to pay him the deference he thought his due. A good many close observers still believe that it would not have taken much to detach him from the Liberal party at this time, and a certain suggestion of design is noticeable in the politeness of the Opposition. The reign of Tory compliments, however, was interrupted by the beginnings of the Lords and Commons quarrel which was to dominate the history of the next few years. An Education

Bill designed to get rid of the grievances of the Nonconformists against the Balfour-Morant Act had been sent to the Lords, together with a Trades Dispute Bill, nullifying the Taff Vale decision.* Lord Lansdowne, the Unionist leader in the House of Lords, decided as a matter of tactics to resist the first and let through the second. It had been determined to make good Mr. Balfour's claim that, whether in office or in Opposition, the Conservative Party should mould the destinies of the country, and the House of Lords was to be used to kill or emasculate every Liberal Bill not supported by any overwhelming body of public opinion. No doubt Lord Lansdowne had reason in believing that in slaying the Liberal Education Bill and sparing the Trades Disputes Bill he was choosing ground 'as favourable as possible.' In the Commons Labour was weak and Nonconformity strong, but in the country Labour was a growing and Nonconformity a declining force. For all that the policy was ill-advised. The public at large might care little for Mr. Birrell's Bill. But the newer type of working class elector quickly grasped the fact that there could be no fast travelling on the path he wanted to follow while the veto of the Peers remained; and it was for this reason that Mr. Lloyd George's denunciations of the 'idle rich' were well received by men who had in fact (or conceived themselves to have) a much deeper quarrel with the industrious rich. The intelligent Northern or Midland artisan or miner could not possibly take very seriously, from the economic standpoint, Mr. George's arraignment of families which, made great at the Reformation, had almost ceased to count as monsters of wealth in the twentieth century. But such a man did strongly object to what he thought the undue political power of such families, especially as it was exercised for the protection of those he regarded as his natural enemies, and he cared little what stick was used to beat them. Thus working-class audiences, far more familiar with economic fact than Mr. George himself, cheered and laughed when, representing the old rich as the one enemy, he inferentially approved the new rich. The latter, in years to come, were to show themselves not altogether ungrateful to their eulogist.

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* Which made Trades Unions liable for damage done during Labour troubles by their members.

It is noteworthy of the change that had come over Mr. George that he rather minimised the importance of the rejection of the Education Bill. To an audience of Oxford undergraduates he declared that the Government would not accept Mr. Balfour's challenge to dissolve. They would wait, he said, for an issue on a 'much larger measure.' As Mr. Asquith used to say, Mr. George was 'getting on.' The outraged feelings of Nonconformity, even of Wales, were no longer of the first importance. In another speech he instanced the rejection of a Plural Voting Bill as an opportunity to deal with the presumptuous Lords, those representatives of 'petrified Toryism.' The plural voter, it seemed, was more the enemy than the Catechism. The member for Carnarvon had not lost so far, perhaps, 'fifty per cent. of his Radicalism;' he had certainly shed something of his sectarian fervour.

To Wales, indignant besides that the Government had allowed Disestablishment to be approached by the tortuous path of a Royal Commission—as if it had not long been a *chose jugée*—the relative nonchalance of the President of the Board of Trade was painful. He no longer spoke of the Church quite as befitted a hater of the 'Old Enemy,' and even hinted at 'Disestablishment by Consent' as an attainable ideal. At Cardiff, in the Autumn of 1907, he neglected the religious issue to enlarge on secular and social questions. 'If,' he said, 'it were found that a Liberal Government at the end of an average term of office has done nothing to cope seriously with the social condition of the people, to remove the national degradation of the slum, of widespread poverty and destitution in a land glittering with wealth; that they have shrunk from attacking boldly the main causes of this wretchedness, notably drink and the vicious land system; that they have not resisted waste of national resources in armaments, nor provided honourable sustenance for deserving old age; that they have tamely allowed the House of Lords to extract all the virtue out of their Bills, so that the Liberal Statute Book remained simply a bundle of sapless legislative faggots fit only for the fire—then would arise a real cry for a new party, and in that cry many of us here would join. But if a Liberal Government will tackle the landlords and the brewers and the peers, as they have faced the parsons, and try to deliver the country from the pernicious control of this confederacy of monopolists, then the Independent Labour Party will call in vain upon the working man to desert Liberalism.'

Some of the disappointed Welsh sectarians, like Mr. Gregsbury's constituents, went so far as to suggest that these remarks 'savoured of a gammon tendency,' and Mr. George was forced to argue, at various meetings, that the House of Lords must be stormed before Disestablishment could come. Beat the Amalekite first, he said: 'What is the use of firing at Moses and Joshua?' But still Wales was hardly satisfied. It appeared to be thought that part of Joshua's business was to make the sun stand still in Ajalon until the wrongs of Wales were righted, and certain old enemies, like Mr. D. A. Thomas, once more dared to raise their voices in criticism. Blunt things were said. It was impossible, Mr. Thomas suggested, to sustain the double part of national leader and Cabinet Minister. Such a feat was certainly difficult, and doubtless would have been impossible for any ordinary man. But Mr. Lloyd George, by dint of emotional appeal—'God knows how dear Wales is to me,' and so forth—contrived to repel the wounding insinuations that he was too much at ease in Zion in view of the woes of his compatriots.

That he was considerably at ease there was no gainsaying. The first Education Bill, Mr. Birrell's, was 'so mutilated as to take the life out of it.' The second, introduced to 'bring not peace but a sword' by Mr. McKenna, was withdrawn in favour of a third measure, fathered by Mr. Runciman, having, it was understood, episcopal and even archiepiscopal support. But in the end the Primate declined it with thanks, and it was not pressed. 'Facing the parsons,' in such circumstances, was maliciously represented in some quarters as turning a back on the Nonconformists. Of course the charge would not bear analysis. All that could be fairly attributed to the once fiery sectarian was a fall in temperature specially noticeable on this subject, but also affecting his general attitude. In supporting Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's resolution* in favour of restricting the power of the Peers so that 'within the limits of a single Parliament the final decision of the Commons shall prevail,' Mr. George spoke trenchantly, but with a certain moderation. The House of Lords had always maltreated Nonconformist Bills; 'the only Nonconformist Bill that was allowed to get through the first time was the Burials Bill; they did not mind how Dissenters were buried, so long as they were out of the way.' The House of Lords was 'Mr. Balfour's poodle; it barks for him; it fetches and carries for him; it bites anybody that he sets it on to.' Every Liberal statesman for fifty years had always come into collision with it, and had arrived at the conclusion that progress was impossible until this barrier had been dealt with.

The speech was an excellent example of Mr. George's Front Bench manner at this time; there were always a few little ingredients to give a characteristic flavour, a few others to meet special electoral or sectarian requirements, but the utterance as a whole was a reflection of the mood of a tame Government. On the platform he might be somewhat shriller, but on the whole this was the quietest period of his career, and at the end of it he had acquired a reputation for fundamental sanity which was never wholly obscured during the contentions which were to follow.

As already noted, this legend was, perhaps, most powerful on the Conservative side of the House. Both Mr. Law and Lord Milner paid Mr. George high compliment for his conduct of the complicated Port of London Bill, and from a very early period there mingled with hostility a wistful admiration—as one should say 'What an asset, if only he were on the right side!' The Tariff Reformers detected a spiritual kinship; the progressive bureaucratic element recognised some intellectual affinity; the extreme Imperialists guessed that, once he had ceased to be a Little Wales man, he must come either to Imperialism or Internationalism, and that a certain robustness and fullness of blood would probably bring him finally to the Imperialist camp. Among the Liberal intellectuals there was some slight tendency to disparage Mr. George, to look on his kind of eloquence as rather bad form, to regard him as a political 'genius without aspirates.' On the other side, even at this period, due justice was done to his gift of popular appeal, and he on his part was not insensible to such admiration, These facts were to be obscured in the noisy conflict about to open, but they explain many things, including the ease with which the second War Coalition was formed under Mr. George's chieftainship.

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* During the session of 1907.

In April, 1908, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, broken in health, resigned office, and Mr. Herbert Henry Asquith became Prime Minister. A reconstruction of the Cabinet followed. Mr. Reginald McKenna replaced Lord Tweedmouth at the Admiralty; to Mr. Lloyd George was assigned the great post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Mr. Winston Churchill filled the vacancy at the Board of Trade.

Mr. George's promotion was well received. 'Practical business capacity, self-restraint, initiative, and large open-mindedness, allied with the faculty of conciliation'*—such were the qualifications ascribed to the man who a few years before had been hunted by mobs, and a few months afterwards was to be denounced as the preacher of class war. Two years of fairly quiet administration, two years of comparative moderation in speech, together with the merit of having averted a general railway strike in the autumn of 1907, had had their great reward.

Still, if the situation be examined a little closer, it is somewhat singular that the new Prime Minister should have appointed to so important a post a politician of experience so limited and of a record so turbulent. Mr. George had, as the phrase goes, 'done well,' but had accomplished nothing which, to the old way of thinking, justified translation to an office usually reserved to ripe statesmanship. Now, Mr. Asquith was very much of the old way of thinking, and, moreover, handicapped by a singularity of taste and temper which would naturally lead him to belittle rather than magnify the real abilities which underlay the surface brilliance of his lieutenant. Mr. Asquith's chief weakness has been an over-relish for men made in his own image, and consequently an undue depreciation of types which have also their place—and an important one—in Parliamentary Government. Mr. George had never sat at the feet of Jowett; he represented no fixed philosophy; he thought and spoke loosely; he was, in short, an emotional empiric. All that was exactly what Mr. Asquith, on the intellectual plane, most disliked (though there was an artistic side of him which could appreciate the comedian and the rhetorical artist), and it may be taken for granted that, as a free man, he would never have placed Mr. George at the Exchequer. There happened to be a singular dearth of mature ability of the desired kind, but in Mr. Reginald McKenna Mr. Asquith had, while at the Treasury, detected something like a genius for finance, and Mr. McKenna's mind, vigorous, clear, masculine, prosaic, and highly cultivated, was sufficiently of the Jowett pattern to recommend him to the Prime Minister. After offering the Exchequer to Mr. John Morley as a *beau geste*,* Mr. Asquith would no doubt, if left to himself, have promoted the subordinate who, of all the younger men, seemed most fitted for the control of national finance. But Mr. Asquith was not left to himself. He soon found that, in his peculiar position—his succession, though undisputed, was hardly popular—he could not afford to begin with a first-class quarrel, and Mr. Lloyd George contrived to make it clear that peace could be purchased only at one price.

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* The *Daily Mail.*

A certain antagonism between the two statesmen dates from this time. It did not preclude affection and admiration on the side of the younger man, and more than one striking display of chivalry on the part of the elder. But in the years to come Mr. Asquith, with his love of a quiet life, must often have reflected on the ease which might have been his if, instead of an artist expressing himself through the political medium, there had been a humdrum administrator at the Exchequer; while to Mr. George, conscious of his own powers, oratorical and strategic, there could hardly fail to occur some little prompting of envy, perhaps also of resentment at the bland discouragement of so many of his enthusiasms. Mr. Asquith's discipline was generally loose; up to a point Mr. George could do very much as he liked, and Mr. Asquith was never weary in that sort of well-doing which consists in seeing a comrade through a scrape of his own manufacture. But he had also a genius for abating fervour, a trick of getting his own way in vital matters, and a knack of asserting very quietly a superiority which could be extremely galling to one who imagined himself the vital spark of the Party. In a Cabinet which included several men of Mr. Asquith's kind Mr. George must often have felt little more comfortable than some fiery revivalist preaching before a congregation of Bishops and Deans.

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* Mr. Duparcq states that such an offer was actually made and declined.

See Spender & Asquith "Lord Asquith"
& Morley "Recollections"

Every Minister tends to magnify his own office, and this natural weakness has been almost amusingly illustrated in Mr. Lloyd George's career. When he was Minister of Munitions, shells were the only cry; at the War Office he discovered that men and movements mattered most; in subordinate office he wished to reduce the powers of the Prime Minister; in supreme office he became at once a personal ruler. Being of this temper, it was natural that from the moment he went to the Treasury he began to revolve grandiose schemes to be carried through in the form of Money Bills, and in his very first speech after promotion we find him talking of saving money on the national defences and spending it on the 'social reform' which in his election addresses little more than two years before he had rather deprecated as not yet 'practical politics.' Most conveniently he found that 'Free Trade is a great pacificator' which was 'slowly but surely cleaving its way through the dense and dark thickets of armaments to the sunny lands of brotherhood among the nations.'* Social Reform was already the object to be advertised;

*** Speech at Manchester in support of Mr. Churchill's Candidature.**

the German menace already the bogey to be ridiculed. For Social Reform armaments must be reduced, lest taxation should be enormously increased, and popularity startlingly diminished, and to justify the reduction of armaments the public must be made to believe that so long as we traded freely with Germany she would never think of fighting us.

Two or three months later* Mr. George went further. Why should we be surprised at Germany wanting to better her position at sea? 'We started it'—with our 'let there be Dreadnoughts.' We insisted on a two-Power Standard. But Germany had not a two-Power Standard on land. 'Don't forget that when you wonder why Germany is frightened at alliances and understandings and some sorts of mysterious workings which appear in the Press. . . . I want our friends who think that, because Germany is a little frightened, she really means mischief to us, to remember that she is frightened for a reason which would frighten us under the same circumstances.'

At this time Mr. Churchill was working in strict concert with Mr. Lloyd George; Germany, he said at a Welsh gathering, had 'nothing to fight about, no prize to fight for, no place to fight in'; and we rejoiced as a nation in everything bringing good to that 'strong, patient, industrious German people.'

Mr. Lewis Harcourt,† outside the combination, helped it by his declaration that not for fifteen years had Anglo-German relations been on so satisfactory a footing. These three had taken quite literally the Kaiser's assurances to Lord Tweedmouth that the German naval law was not aimed at England. Other members of the Government were less ingenuous. Mr. Asquith, on becoming Premier, had at once put Lord Tweedmouth out of harm's way, and on May 5, 1908, Lord Fisher, the First Sea Lord, could write,‡ 'Yesterday, with all Sea Lords present, Mr. McKenna formally agreed to four Dreadnoughts and if necessary six Dreadnoughts next year (perhaps the greatest triumph ever known). . . . He tells me Harcourt for certain will resign.' It was more nearly Mr. McKenna who resigned. Mr. George and Mr. Churchill held that four capital ships were ample, and the First Lord was only saved by the intervention of Sir Edward Grey, who was quite prepared to leave the Foreign Office if full measure of national security were not decreed. Mr. George was thus worsted on the first round.

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* At a meeting of the Peace Society at Queen's Hall, London.

† Afterwards Viscount Harcourt.

‡ To Lord Esher.

The Budget of 1908 had been introduced by Mr. Asquith; it fell, however, to Mr. George to pilot through the Commons the Old Age Pensions Bill drafted by that statesman. He was at pains to say that the measure was 'only a beginning'; even more important was provision for the sick and the unemployed, on account of which he was 'looking for someone's hen-roost to rob next year':—

> 'These problems of the sick, of the infirm, of the men who cannot find means of earning a livelihood, though they seek it as though they were seeking for alms, who are out of work through no fault of their own and who cannot even guess the reason why, are problems with which it is the business of the State to deal; they are problems which the State has too long neglected.'

At a later time it was claimed for Mr. George by too enthusiastic admirers that he was the sole begetter of the pensions policy. The lukewarmness of his admiration for the baby, his insistence on the much finer children of his own breeding to come, are a sufficient commentary on this theory. Nevertheless, Mr. George wheeled the perambulator of the belittled bantling through the Commons with cool skill, contriving, moreover, always to play the part of Mr. Spenlow when the firm of Spenlow and Jorkins was charged with any want of heart. One clause of the Bill as drafted penalised model married couples; a husband and wife living together were to receive less than if they lived apart. Labour protested, but word had been given that the

Government could afford no further concessions that involved additional expenditure. Mr. McKenna was temporarily in charge when the feeling in Committee on this point became evidently rebellious. Rather watch-dog than plenipotentiary, he could promise nothing, and on his head the storm broke; he was denounced on all hands as the harsh, hide-bound official, without bowels or common sense. Suddenly Mr. George entered, caught the situation at once, and after a few words with the Prime Minister announced that the Government would give way if no further concession were demanded. With the single stroke he had made a good bargain and given a handsome public testimonial to his own humanity. Everybody was satisfied, except perhaps the luckless Mr. McKenna, who received no compliments. This is no uncommon experience of Mr. George's working partners. Against the satisfaction of acting with so brilliant a professor of the art of eleventh-hour compromise must always be set the risk of some moral and intellectual damage. For Mr. George, with the late Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, holds that 'consistency is not so important; the main point is that we should be always right.' And that Mr. George shall always be—or appear—right, others must sometimes be content to appear wrong.

Lord Lansdowne, who had killed the Government's Licensing Bill, admitted Old Age Pensions to the Statute Book, while deploring that it would cost as much as a great war without a war's advantages, since 'a war has at any rate the effect of raising the moral fibre of the nation, whereas this measure, I am much afraid, will weaken the moral fibre of the nation and diminish the self-respect of the people.' How Lord Lansdowne's own moral fibre was raised by war is a matter of history, but that is only by the way. More relevant is the point that the Old Age Pensions Bill was almost the only capital measure the Government had been permitted to make law. If this state of things were to continue, without fight being shown in earnest, the Liberal Party must die of inanition. It was quite clear to Mr. Lloyd George that something must be done to raise a real, raging, devastating storm. There would have been no popular excitement over the Education Bill; popular excitement over the Licensing Bill might well operate adversely to the Liberals. The moment, as a Liberal writer* has told us, had come for a great adventure. That adventure was 'The People's Budget.' If the Lords swallowed 'social reform' in the form of a Finance Bill, well and good: the Liberals would have something to boast of to the electorate; besides, the process might be repeated indefinitely. If the Lords threw out a 'social reform' Budget, then still better; they would be committing suicide; the balance of the Constitution would be upset, and, however little the working man cared about niceties of usage, he would at once see that the value of his vote would be gone if an indissoluble Chamber limited the power over finance of a Chamber liable to dissolution. In this quarrel there would be a fight that could only end when the pretensions of the Lords had been shattered.

Revolving this notable scheme, Mr. George made in the late summer of 1908 a tour of Germany so important in its results as to be almost a part of national history. He drank, though 'almost a teetotaller,' glasses of 'foaming beer' with the Imperial Chancellor,† he was entertained at the Berlin Zoological Gardens, he was shown the wreck of a Zeppelin at Stuttgart. He studied the German system of national Insurance—'a superb scheme it is,' he was to say next year in introducing his Budget—and resolved that something like it must be introduced at home. Incidentally he was interviewed by an Austrian journalist, to whom he declared himself warmly in favour of an Anglo-German understanding. A few weeks later Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a large step forward was thus taken in the direction of the Great War. How far Mr. George's efforts for international amity may have contributed to the increased aggressiveness thus exemplified cannot be estimated. But the effect of the German visit on himself was considerable. The manner in which he was fêted and flattered confirmed him in his conviction of the friendly disposition of Germany, while he returned full of admiration for German bureaucratic methods—so impressed, indeed, that a young civil servant at the Treasury deemed it wise to 'get up' National Insurance, and thus, attracting the notice of his political chief, laid the foundations of the vast if undefined power afterwards enjoyed by Sir William Sutherland.

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* Mr. A. G. Gardiner.

† Mr. Harold Spender's account of the visit.

It was quite natural that Mr. Lloyd George should have been readily fascinated by the spectacle of German efficiency. His is a mind which in one mood responds to the vision of liberty and at another is entranced with the reality of intelligent despotism. He is like those Frenchmen who marched to battle alternately singing the Marseillaise and shouting 'Vive l'Empereur'; there is no conscious inconsistency, but only the very common and pathetic wish to combine the different advantages of incompatible things. It was seen both earlier and later in Mr. George's attempt to be a Protectionist Free Trader; it was seen during the war in his desire to be impregnable in the West and omnipotent in the East; it was seen during the peace in his attempts to incorporate into a single document the spirit of the French and the quite different spirit of the American policy; it was signally exhibited when he coupled his Irish scheme with conscription; it pervaded all his reconstruction plans, which presumed that all the advantage of State control can be combined with all the characteristic virtues of private enterprise; it was to be traced in almost every measure of the Coalition Government.

When Mr. George said 'every grain of freedom is more precious than radium,' he no doubt partially believed it, and his faith was not lessened when he looked on Imperial Germany and found that it was good. The 'large neatness' (to quote Mr. Wells) of the German scheme of life contrasted impressively with the large untidiness of England's; the hard-working aristocracy, the regimented working classes, the unlittered streets, the carefully utilised resources, the horror of waste and disorder, the State encouragements and prohibitions—all this seemed very good, and none the worse because it made the official vastly important. But then there was the not-so-good—the Death's Head Hussar side of

Germany, the side of Zabern and the sabred cobbler too lame to salute smartly. Well, we Britons need not import that side. Why not pick and choose, take the things that suited us and leave the things we disliked? Keeping all our liberty, we could yet gain the benefits of German order and system. Such is the reasoning of the 'born Coalitionist.' Britain, Mr. George thought after his German trip, should be a free and unmilitarist Prussia; the freedom of the Welsh mountains should be married to the order of the Krupp factories. He forgot (or did not think) that German docility and German militarism both spring from a peculiarity, racial or otherwise, which has made the Germanies the home sometimes of despotism, and sometimes of anarchy, but never for long of free citizenship.

CHAPTER IX

MR. LLOYD GEORGE'S Budget, introduced on April 29, 1909, was viewed with little favour by perhaps a majority of the Cabinet, and with active dislike by some of the most powerful members. Indeed, its only whole-hearted friend among Ministers who counted was Mr. Churchill, then in the midsummer heat of a friendship which was soon to pass the solstice, and decline to a low temperature. It was only by sheer force of character that Mr. George overcame the timidities of some and the outraged economic susceptibilities of others—the first unwilling to risk a fight with the House of Lords, the second averse from the importation of sensation into the region of high finance. Objections on the latter ground remained unimpaired in force by the passage of time. But those who looked on the Budget as bad Party tactics were constrained to admit error. The Budget not only brought Mr. George into the very centre of the political picture, where, but for brief intervals, he has since remained, but it certainly secured, though chiefly owing to the folly of the Opposition, a long lease of life to a Government rapidly declining in vigour.

In the early months of the year it was clear, as one of the Conservative leaders claimed, that the feeling of the country was 'predominantly Tory.' With that curious instinct for realities which alone prevents* politics in this country from becoming quite insane, the average elector had suddenly realised that the German menace was not the invention of a caucus or a newspaper. He had taken quite seriously the cry for 'eight Dreadnoughts,' and in his mood of alarm talk about the cheap loaf, undenominational education, land values, the Church in Wales, and the drink trade seemed curiously empty. Strange panics possessed the people. There was talk of mysterious airships showing lights which astronomers, no doubt wishing to oblige the shifty Administration which was their paymaster, explained were only shooting stars. A by-election at Croydon revealed an enormous turn-over in the specially sensitive London area. The Government was distrusted on this question. It might contain patriotic people who wanted 'eight,' and were indisposed to wait. But then it also included Messrs. Churchill and George, who talked about the 'sheer cowardice' and 'criminal extravagance' of additional expenditure.

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* Perhaps the past tense should be used, for the instinct seems to have lost much of its force.

It was assumed that these statesmen dominated the Cabinet. In fact they did not. Mr. McKenna stuck to his guns and his ships, and when the Naval Estimates were introduced on March 16th the defeat of the 'anti-eights' was apparent. 'The safety of the Empire,' said Mr. McKenna, 'stands above all considerations.' The First Lord had had a hard fight, and according to Lord Fisher* had sometimes 'been practically out of the Cabinet for twenty-four hours at a time,' but he had won, and the memory of this defeat was quite evidently still rankling in Mr. George's mind when he began his Budget speech.

'Spending,' he said, 'is pleasant; paying is irksome, spending is noble; paying is sordid. And on me falls the labour of making the arrangements for the less attractive part of the Naval programme.' He dealt with the 'unworthy suspicion' that any member of the Government would risk even for an hour the country's immunity from invasion. But it would also be an act of criminal insanity to build 'gigantic flotillas to encounter mythical armadas.' And we could not afford to 'build Navies against nightmares.' If this were a door left open for retreat it was destined never to be used. Mr. McKenna stayed at the Admiralty till 1911, spent nearly forty millions on new construction, and increased the annual cost of the Navy by ten millions. Probably in 1914 Mr. George was not sorry that this 'third-rate Minister,'†—Lord Fisher declared his readiness to 'go to the stake for Mr. McKenna'—had had his way.

Mr. George's Budget speech occupied four hours and a half, and there was a half-hour's interval for congratulations and coffee. Much of the time was occupied with lengthy dissertations of little relevance to revenue. Indeed the main fault of the Budget, as seen in the dry light of after years, was its failure as a revenue-producing instrument. The speech abounded in promises; it bristled with taunts. It spoke of millions to be wrung from the Trade that lived by 'swilling and tippling'; of other millions to be wrung from the land of which the House of Lords owned so much. But it should have been perfectly clear from the first that the duty on which the Chancellor laid chief stress, the increment value duty on land, could not, if honestly exacted, yield much. To impose on mere profits in land and house investment a special duty of twenty per cent. was, of course, easy enough. But that could not be an honest interpretation of 'increment value'—the increase in the money worth of a site through the growth of population, and the progress of public improvements—and if the honest interpretation were accepted the proceeds of the tax must be, as they actually proved, not worth for many years to come the trouble of collection.* Nor was the undeveloped land duty a very formidable affair. The real venom of the Budget lay in the increased income-tax, super-tax, and death duties, which hit rich men of all kinds, and in the increase of stamp, motor-car, spirit, and tobacco duties, which affected every class.

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* Letter to Lord Esher. † The *Daily News*.

It is true that Mr. George, by his apocalyptic language, gave an impression that the 'hen-roosts' had been marked down for a far more serious plunder in future. 'This,' he said, 'is a War Budget. It is for raising money to wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness. I cannot help hoping and believing that before this generation has passed away we shall have advanced a great step towards that good time when poverty and wretchedness and the human

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* For the financial year 1914-15 the cost of the Land Valuation Department was £760,000. Receipts for the new land taxes during the same period were:—

Increment Value Duty,	£48,316
Reversion Duty,	19,313
Undeveloped Land Duty,	8,651

The taxes were abandoned as useless and costly in 1920.

degradation that always follow in their camp will be as remote to the people of this country as the wolves which once infested their forests.'

The Budget at first produced little shock among the squires who were supposed to be its chief victims. Exposed to decorously searching criticism it would have fallen, without doubt, a little flat, and would certainly not have saved the Liberal Government from heavy defeat at the polls at the next General Election. But certain Conservative leaders agreed at this time to imitate the dog in Goldsmith's ballad. To serve some private ends they 'went mad, and bit the man'—and it was not the man who died. There are few instances of an insanity, so deliberately assumed by a few, almost instantaneously affecting whole classes. Grave financiers denounced the Budget not, as they might have done, as unduly political, but as a challenge to every stable interest. Landowners were frightened with stories of a horrid conspiracy of which this was but the first move. A new Domesday Book was to be compiled; their land was to be valued, and valuation, clearly, was a step towards complete confiscation. Everybody with a couple of hundred pounds was told that 'property' must combine against the 'little Welsh attorney,' the common foe and oppressor of all men of substance.

We have seen what Mr. George hoped to achieve by the Budget. His adversaries played his game for him much better than he could possibly have played it himself. His one great peril was a cool and critical examination of his proposals. The Budget had been advertised long beforehand as a thing to shake mankind. If Conservative mankind had refused to be shaken, if it had calmly examined all the proposals about afforestation, the Development Fund, the new Domesday Book, the army of German-model bureaucrats to be unproductively employed in doing what was either not worth doing or what people could do much better themselves, the scheme of the Budget could have been killed with ridicule. There was nothing improper in any of these taxes, as taxes; there was much to be criticised in the plans they were to finance. They implied a bureaucratic idea of Government which was certainly not to the taste of the British people at that time. Mr. George had drunk something more potent than honest lager beer from those foaming tankards in Germany. With his mind full of the vision of a Germanised bureaucratic England, he saw his horde of land valuers, not as devourers of the taxpayers' substance, but as living advertisements of the country's forwardness; he envisaged his insurance cards and stamps not as a new social complication, annoying even if necessary, but as a panoply for the people to be proud of, marking them off from mere Frenchmen or Spaniards, and ranking them with the splendid Prussians. In the days of the Boer War he had played at soldiers; he was now playing at officials. In short, the Budget of 1909 was not the work of a financier, great or small; it was the product of a considerable poet, working in the expensive medium of politics. The one thing necessary for the destructive critic was to paraphrase the poem into very ordinary prose. The one thing Mr. George's critics actually accomplished was to create an atmosphere in which the poet's frenzy seemed, by comparison, sane.

Left alone, Mr. Balfour would have given Mr. George little help. His first criticisms on the Budget were slightly satirical and wholly common sense. Though, in Mr. George's references to the Liquor Trade, he affected to hear 'the swish of the scorpions,' he merely expressed scorn for the futility of the immediate proposals regarding land, and was inclined to dwell rather on the abolition of the old Sinking Fund. On the Liberal side, there was a broad hint of compromise; in Whiggish opinion the land taxes might as well be dropped, as producing much cry for very little wool.

But on both sides were zealots panting for a fight—journalists of the epileptic kind, rebels against the 'old gangs' of both parties, young politicians with ambitions, old politicians with grudges, and a quite honest body of frightened people. A Budget League and an Anti-Budget League were formed, which of course meant that a number of good people acquired a vested interest in whipping up excitement, prolonging and embittering the fight. The really odd thing, however, was the manner in which Budget lunacy affected the cold hard men of the world of finance, those whom our novelists and playwrights represent as above the sway of vulgar passions. Thus Lord Rothschild, forgetting the caution which generally distinguishes men of his race and calling, consented to make a chiefly inaudible protest against the Budget at a City of London meeting. It was a rich gift to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. 'We are having too much of Lord Rothschild,' retorted Mr. George at a political luncheon the day after :—

> 'We are not to have temperance reform in this country. Why? Because Lord Rothschild has sent a circular to the Peers to say so. We must have more Dreadnoughts. Why? Because Lord Rothschild has told us so at a meeting in the City. We must not pay for them when we have got them. Why? Because Lord Rothschild says no. You must not have an estate duty and a super-tax. Why? Because Lord Rothschild has sent a protest on behalf of the bankers to say he won't stand it. You must not have a tax on reversions. Why? Because Lord Rothschild as chairman of an insurance company said he wouldn't stand it. You must not have a tax on undeveloped land. Why? Because Lord Rothschild is chairman of an industrial housing company. You must not have Old Age Pensions. Why? Because Lord Rothschild was a member of a Committee that said it could not be done. Are we really to have all the ways of reform, financial and social, blocked by a notice board: "No thoroughfare: By order of Nathaniel Rothschild?"'

In the Commons the Budget proposals were for seventy-three days the subject of debate. There were several all-night sittings, and five hundred and fifty divisions were taken. The closure was seldom used; only eight times in all. Mr. George, it seemed, cared little how much time was devoted to his great measure, and was even reconciled to the dropping of a Welsh

Disestablishment Bill. This concentration of purpose involves some personal suffering. For weeks a victim of neuritis, he appeared night after night with his arm in a sling. It was no uncommon thing for him to speak twenty times in a single sitting. Sometimes he would go out early in the morning, with Mr. Churchill, for a cup of coffee or a cigar, but he was seldom away more than half an hour and never failed to relieve the sentinel —Mr. Haldane, Mr. Ure, or Mr. Herbert Samuel—whom he had left on duty. Generally his eye wandered towards closing time to the grille, behind which Mrs. George was watching him. When progress was reported he would look up with a smile and a sigh of relief, toss his papers into his despatch case, and a few moments later husband and wife were crossing Whitehall to 11 Downing-street.

The resistance of the Conservatives in Committee was chiefly entrusted to Mr. Austen Chamberlain, who raised his debating reputation by his resource and pertinacity. There were special champions for special interests, but Mr. F. E. Smith blazed like a comet, 'wagging his tail of phosphorescent nothingness across the steadfast stars.' On the whole the arguments inside the House were moderate; they were chiefly to the effect that the Chancellor, in providing about sixteen millions of additional revenue, had done so in the most disturbing and unsound manner. It was outside the House that all the sound and fury rose.

The commotion was brought to a climax by the Limehouse speech at the end of July. To understand the effect of this speech it is necessary to remember that there was real dread of 'Socialism,' and people were not simply thinking of the Budget, but asking that very old question, 'Where is all this going to end?' So, when Mr. George talked about 'making war on poverty' he was read as wanting to make war on everybody who was not exactly poor, and the Limehouse speech made the nervous afraid of something tending to what has actually happened in Russia. Mr. George began by talking about the duty of the State to the poor. 'It is rather hard that an old workman should have to find his way to the gates of the tomb bleeding and footsore, through the brambles and thorns of poverty. We cut a new path for him—an easier one, a pleasanter one, through fields of waving corn. We are raising money to pay for the new road—aye, and to widen it, so that two hundred thousand paupers shall be able to join in the march.' The reference was, of course, to an extension of the Old Age Pensions Act.

The simile was perhaps not well chosen; a right of way on such a scale through 'waving corn' would appeal neither to the farmer nor to the surveyor. But Limehouse and the country were not disposed to be critical on such a point. The speech, indeed, was never coolly examined in detail, but condemned or applauded on its general tone. Never since the 'ransom' days of Mr. Chamberlain had a Minister of the Crown spoken in such frank terms of rich and stately people. A respect for wealth as wealth had grown rapidly during the thirty years that separated the Budget from the unauthorised programme, and to many who agreed with him in principle it must have seemed that Mr. George, in speaking of 'very shabby rich men,' was guilty of a species of blasphemy.

To those who contended that the same arguments which would justify the increment duty would also justify similar taxation on a doctor's practice, increased through the natural growth of population, Mr. George replied by denying that there was any comparison. The landlord did not earn his wealth; he did not even receive it or spend it himself; 'his sole function, his chief pride, was the stately consumption of wealth produced by others.' What of the doctor, who visited our homes when darkened by the shadow of death, who by his skill, his trained courage, his genius, 'wrings hope out of the grip of despair, wins life out of the fangs of the great destroyer?' To compare his reward with the wealth that poured into the pockets of the landlord was a piece of insolence.

As to the Dukes—'Oh, these Dukes, how they harass us!'—he adduced a number of instances of the manner in which they had profited by their monopoly in land. Among them was the sad case of Mr. Gorringe, the draper of Buckingham Palace Road. Mr. Gorringe had had a lease of his premises at a few hundreds a year from the Duke of Westminster. When the lease came to an end Mr. Gorringe was told that the ground-rent in future would be £4,000 a year, that he must pay a fine of £50,000, and must build huge premises at enormous expense, from plans approved by the Duke. 'All I can say is this: If it is confiscation and robbery for us to say to that Duke that, being in need of money for public purposes, we will take ten per cent. of all you have got for those purposes, what would you call his taking nine-tenths from Mr. Gorringe?'

The prose of the transaction could not support the picture of a ducal Shylock carving the flesh of an oppressed tradesman, but, as Mr. George said, it was the system he was attacking, not individuals; 'it is not business, it is blackmail.' He attacked the coal royalty system also with an emphasis which proved embarrassing at a later period, when he had to controvert much the same arguments from Labour leaders.

'We are placing burdens,' he ended, 'on the broadest shoulders. Why should we put burdens on the people? I am one of the children of the people. I was brought up amongst them. I know their trials, and God forbid that I should add one grain of trouble to the anxieties which they bear with such patience and fortitude. When the Prime Minister did me the honour of inviting me to take charge of the National Exchequer at a time of great difficulty I made up my mind, in framing the Budget which was in front of me, that at any rate no cupboard should be barer, no lot should be harder. By that test I challenge you to judge the Budget.'

This speech was spoken without passion, and the tones were seldom louder than the conversational level. Nobody was more surprised than Mr. George himself at the storm it provoked. He seems genuinely to have believed that he was making a serious contribution to the discussion of the land and leasehold system, and was unprepared for the fierce attacks which at once followed. The immediate effect of the speech, however, was to make easier the path of the Budget. Hitherto it had not been altogether a Party success. The richer

Liberals, who always hated it, had on certain points voted with the Opposition, on one occasion to the number of twenty-three. But Limehouse showed these malcontents that serious resistance would be a grave matter; Mr. George could not have spoken with such confident audacity had not the Prime Minister at last come on his side. The shrewder leaders of the Opposition, too, could see that, failing a Liberal revolt, uncompromising opposition would be disastrous. Almost immediately came a suggestion of compromise, and Mr. J. L. Garvin* was reproved for 'talking nonsense' about killing the Budget in the House of Lords. The 'modern Jack Cade,' as Sir Edward Carson called Mr. George, seemed to have command of the situation. At the end of July there was general talk of surrender, and the *Daily Mail*—then a sure political barometer—began to discourse about the 'greatness' of many of Mr. George's plans. Lord Rosebery, on the other hand, declared that the Liberals were moving on the path that leads to Socialism, and on that path he would not follow them an inch. 'Any form of Protection is an evil, but Socialism is the end of all, the negation of faith, of family, of property, of monarchy, of empire.'

This croak from the withered branch was welcomed, but it would have carried little weight in itself. The opposition to the Budget, which seemed to be collapsing just after Limehouse, was galvanised into new and feverish life from another quarter. The extreme Tariff Reformers desired only to precipitate an election, which, being exceedingly bad judges of a political situation, they conceived could be advantageously fought on the issue of a Budget rejected by the House of Lords. From the first the journalistic dervishes of the Party had chanted a shrieking monotone to this effect. But now a more dignified voice took up the cry. Lord Milner, emerging suddenly from pensioned and honoured ease, suddenly entered the political arena; Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, from his retirement, was induced to write that he hoped the House of Lords would 'see their way to force an election;' and this pronouncement of course had for many people, especially in the Upper House, the authority of a Papal Bull. The Budget was lost, and Mr. George's future, which to a cool observer might have seemed in some peril, was saved.

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* Editor of *The Observer*.

For, left to itself, the Budget would have gone through in normal fashion; it would have done little to satisfy the gigantic expectations its author had raised; and in its failure he might well have been involved. It is exceedingly doubtful whether the English people would for long have responded to the stimulus of speeches of the Limehouse kind. One was good enough fun; a series would have provoked a revulsion of feeling. Landowners are not in England an unpopular class. In London they are good customers, and their doings add an interest to the picture papers. In the country, if they rouse no passionate sense of loyalty, they are disliked much less than plutocratic settlers from the great towns. Mr. George, with his Welsh memories, had mistaken English psychology, and his error was shown in the persistence with which he attacked what it was then the fashion to call the backwoodsman Peer—a type, quiet and not unuseful, for which many an Englishman who dislikes the political and plutocratic aspect of the Peerage has a real kindness. The late Lord Penrhyn might be a real ogre in Wales; the late Lord St. John of Bletso, whom Mr. George dragged at random from his obscurity (to the poor nobleman's intense discomfort) was simply a squire, well enough liked by the very few people who cared anything about him.

The whole business of the Budget was, indeed, curiously anachronistic, and it could never have been but for the very peculiar character and circumstances of Mr. George. 'Il me faut des émotions,' said the Frenchified young lady in *Pendennis*. Mr. George has always interpreted politics in terms of emotion, and the changes in his ideas precisely followed the changes in his life. In 1909 he was still not out of his Welsh period, had only just emerged from the grim struggle to make both ends meet, and his views were coloured by 'David Lloyd's' prejudice against the landowner and all that he stood for. That mood was to last for a few years longer. Under the natural influence of easier circumstances and much golf with rich men, it had almost passed when the accident of the Marconi affair served to revive it. Then another great emotional impulse swept it away, so completely that the begetter of the great increment duty could without a paternal pang, even with an unfeeling jest, view the murder of his child. For if Mr. George, in obedience to his temperament, seldom takes long views of the future, he is even less incommoded by memories of his past. With the happy nature of the Sultan's daughter in Boccaccio, he has been able to pass from experience to experience, and from adventure to adventure, while preserving a virgin freshness.

If he had been defeated on the Budget he would no doubt have done something fresh as a sensation, whether in Government or in Opposition. But there would have been some break, and in that interval much might have happened. The Opposition extremists, by enlarging the Budget issue until it overshadowed every other question, saved Mr. George from the possibility of decline, or fall, or immediate metamorphosis. Henceforward he was supported by the whole strength of his party, and even in a very tight corner he could not be abandoned.

'Only one stock has gone down badly,' said Mr. Lloyd George* at the end of the Committee stage of the Finance Bill. 'There has been a great slump in Dukes.' 'The Lords may decree a revolution,' he exclaimed, 'but the people will direct it.' Nervous people heard the rattle of the tumbrils and the click of the guillotine in his peroration.

> 'These,' he said, 'are the questions which will be asked at the next election, and the answers are charged with peril to the order of things the Peers represent; but they are charged with ripe and refreshing fruit for the parched lips of the multitude who have been treading that dusty road along which the people have marched through the dark ages which are now merging into the light.'

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* Newcastle, October 7.

Possibly it was the contrast between the Jacobin tone and the very middle-class figure of the orator which misled the Unionist chiefs, and made them the more ready to follow Lord Milner's advice and 'damn the consequences.' It was well enough to denounce Mr. Lloyd George as a sort of political Hammer of God. It was good enough propaganda to talk about the revolutionary insanity of the Budget. It was quite permissible to picture the Chancellor as an enemy of all social decencies, so that one Duke would not have him at Blenheim and another wanted to put him, with that other fierce democrat, Mr. Churchill, 'in the middle of twenty-couple of dog-hounds.' But, after Limehouse, a good many of the extreme Conservatives found something disarming in Newcastle. Answers which had the double burden of sustaining peril to the Peers and ripe and refreshing fruit for the multitude would have too much to do to be generally harmful. But the hotheads committed the double mistake of thinking now too much and now too little of Mr. Lloyd George, and at this juncture they made the even more serious error of forgetting that, if the Chancellor of the Exchequer were not a very serious revolutionary, Mr. Asquith was an exceedingly serious Constitutionalist. The men who then gave direction to Unionist opinion altogether under-rated the gravity of the constitutional issue. They were one and all firmly convinced that the working-man cared nothing whatever for the ancient doctrines concerning money bills. And undoubtedly they were right in so far that the working-man was little concerned with technical justifications and objections. But they were calamitously wrong in supposing that he would tolerate the smallest transfer of power from the elected to the hereditary House. The vote had brought him innumerable immunities and advantages, in privilege and solid money, and only very recently he had had two examples of its value in Old Age Pensions and the Trades Disputes Bill. Very little reflection might have assured the followers of Lord Milner that on such an issue they could win only by an electoral miracle. But though there was much cleverness in the party, it was singularly devoid of the native sagacity common among

Englishmen of good social position, and indeed it is more than a coincidence that the leaders were mostly men of non-English tradition, Colonial, Irish, and German.

Before the Budget reached the House of Lords Lord Lansdowne announced his intention, in defiance of all accepted precedent, to move that the House withhold its assent until the measure had been submitted to the judgment of the country. The debate had not proceeded far when the true strength of the Liberal position began to dawn on the ill-advised and unfortunate Peers. They had come with the intention of quenching incendiary flames. They were actually confronted with calm but cogent arguments against raising questions which involved not only the privileges of the House of Commons, sanctioned by centuries of usage, but that of the Crown itself. In short, the tables were turned; they now wore the Jacobin cap they had fitted on Mr. George's head; they were the revolutionaries, the disturbers of established order, the openers of flood-gates, and so forth. The Liberal Peers took a relish in mingling their arguments against rejection with criticism of Mr. George. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was denounced by the very men who pleaded that his Budget should not be rejected. Lord Ribblesdale, speaking of Dukes as 'charming people' and of their assailant as 'half pantaloon and half highwayman,' was as earnest against Lord Lansdowne's counsel as the Archbishop of York, who explained that Mr. George's outbursts were accounted for by that 'mysterious possession of the Celtic temperament which is called the *Hwyl*,' which, he added, 'makes the speaker say he knows not what and excites the audience they know not why.' The pro-Budget speeches must, in short, have been rather more uncomfortable reading for Mr. George than the attacks. But it was too late for subtlety, humour, or common sense to assert their sway. The Peers paid the penalty of a pathetic and unreasoning loyalty to imprudent leaders, and by 350 votes to seventy-five they decided much more than the fate of Mr. Lloyd George's first Budget.

It naturally fell to Mr. Asquith to state to the House of Commons the case for what he considered constitutional principles, and what Mr. Austen Chamberlain called 'legal pedantries.'

Mr. Lloyd George reserved his thunders for a gathering on December 3 at the National Liberal Club. Who, he asked, were the Peers who had thrown his Budget into the street? Lord Lansdowne, he thought, had been forced into his position :—

> 'Who is really on the other side? Lord Curzon unmistakably. . . . Lord Curzon is not a very wise or tactful person. All I would say about him is this—I think he is less dangerous as a ruler of the House of Lords than as a ruler of India. For further particulars apply to Lord Kitchener. And if you want any more information you might apply to Lord Midleton. I will say no more of him. Then there is Lord Milner. There is one thing in common between Lords Milner and Curzon; they are both very clever men, but they both belong to that class of clever men which has every gift except the gift of common sense. Look at the two pro-consuls who took part in the debate: Lord Cromer advising that the Bill should not be thrown out; the other, Lord Milner, advising that it should be thrown out. Lord Cromer is the man who, finding a province devastated by its government, desolated by its war, left it a land of abounding and smiling prosperity. The other found a smiling land—prosperous, leaping into great wealth—and left it, after two years of mismanagement and miscalculation, a scorched and blackened desert. He has a peculiar genius for running institutions and countries into destructive courses.'

Such personal remarks were in the fair cut and thrust of controversy, but in view of Mr. George's subsequent relations with the two Peers so tartly portrayed, they are worth recalling. It was to Lord Milner, the man of 'peculiar genius for running institutions and countries into destructive courses' that he looked in 1918 when the peace of Europe had to be settled. It was to Lord Curzon—'not a very wise or tactful person'—that he entrusted the country's foreign affairs. Yet the characters of these two Peers, whatever they may be, were fully developed, and even fully revealed, in 1909.

On the constitutional issue Mr. George, perhaps wisely, said nothing. Probably he said just as much as he cared. His main preoccupation was to blacken the character of Lords in general, as neither toiling nor spinning, nor weaving, nor holding a plough—at this period he discovered a great virtue in the Labour representation in the House of Commons—and to add a specially jetty polish to one or two of his most prominent enemies. 'With all their cunning,' he cried, 'their greed has overborne their craft, and we have got them at last.'

It was the solemn truth. In such a quarrel a party which had Mr. Asquith, his Whiggish nature almost transfigured by the Lords' sacrilege, to guide it, and Mr. Lloyd George to supply electioneering steam, was invincible.

CHAPTER X

DURING the first election of 1910, Mr. Lloyd George, like the spirit in *The Tempest*, 'flamed amazement,' and of those who heard him

'Not a soul
But felt a fever of the mad, and played
Some tricks of desperation.'

Whether this 'dainty Ariel's' efforts were wholly to the satisfaction of Prospero Asquith is another question. The Prime Minister would doubtless have dispensed with many 'dreadful thunderclaps' and 'sulphurous roarings.' Certainly Mr. Asquith would not himself have described the heir of a nobleman as 'the first of the litter.' He would have preferred attacking a Peer on grounds other than that 'he has one man to fix his collar and adjust his tie in the morning, a couple of men to carry a boiled egg to him at breakfast, a fourth man to open the door for him, a fifth man to show him in and out of his carriage, and a sixth and seventh to drive him.'* He would not have asked a South London audience if it had seen 'many Dukes in the Walworth Road,' or if before throwing out the Budget 'any Earls had left their visiting cards.' He can hardly be imagined as telling the Duke of Rutland and the Duke of Beaufort that they 'ought to be gentlemen before they became noblemen,' or Lord George Hamilton that he was 'the hungriest of a hungry family.'† Nor would Mr. Asquith have thought it necessary to dilate, as Mr. George did elsewhere, on the supposed inevitable connection between German protectionism and the Teutonic taste for black bread and 'offal.'‡

Nevertheless, these things had their due part in the Liberal victory, though perhaps the fact that Mr.

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* Speech in Carnarvonshire. † Speech at Falmouth.

‡ Speeches at Reading and Falmouth.

Churchill thoughtlessly went to Blenheim for Christmas somewhat diminished the effects of his comrade's oratory. Mr. Churchill could not, of course, be blamed for his unfortunate origin, or for obeying the call of family affection; but the incident served to remind the vulgar of what it might have forgotten—that the Liberal Party and 'the people' were not precisely identical.

Mr. George had indeed some food for reflection when the full results were known. He had himself kept his seat by over a thousand, but the Liberals had come back in greatly diminished numbers, and there seemed to be little doubt that the heavy mortality among candidates was due to the use made by the Opposition of the German menace. But for the McKenna programme, and Lord Fisher's comforting assurance that people might 'sleep in their beds,' the battle might even have gone against the forces of 'Progress.' As things were, Mr. George could be heard sympathetically when he declared that a Duke was a more present danger than a Death's Head Hussar. But he had been warned that 'Social Reform' was no all-powerful lure, and that, while peace was the desire of all reasonable men and women, Pacificism was the foible of a minority. During the election the Pacificists had been most active. A party of divines had gone to Germany, had been lavishly entertained, and had come back with Admiral von Tirpitz's assurance of the pain he felt because his 'explicit personal assurances' that there would be no acceleration of German naval construction had not been accepted by the British Government. The report of these favoured tourists was given much prominence, and on the strength of it Mr. McKenna was invited to explain his discourtesy to the chief of the German Admiralty. But these efforts completely failed to create an anti-Dreadnought issue. The fact was not lost on Mr. George, and from this time he was impelled to study the German question from a new angle. The conversion was not instantaneous, and this convert, like others, was subject to backsliding; but the election of 1910 may be regarded as a turning point in Mr. George's career. He did not, like Mr. Churchill, become abruptly a Big Navy man; there were even times when, under the influence of peculiar circumstances, he seemed to be more than ever confirmed in the 'building against nightmares' mood. But we are conscious of a difference; it is no longer the man, but only the politician, who talks Pacificism.

The year 1910 began with one election and ended with another. The interval was occupied wholly with the constitutional question and the legislation made necessary by the death of King Edward VII. It was a year in which Mr. Lloyd George claimed but a small share in public notice, though the part he played behind the scenes was not unimportant. Whatever he may have been at other times, Mr. Asquith was certainly master of his own Cabinet during the whole constitutional episode, and he had no notion of relegating so delicate an operation as the removal of the Lords' veto to the rude surgery of his Chancellor of the Exchequer. In many things Mr. George does not want finesse, but this was not likely to be one of them. He would have used the axe. Mr. Asquith, as a constitutional connoisseur, must have lost pleasure in the business had it not been accompanied with all the pomp of a major operation. The mind of the one was concentrated on the end. The other was vastly interested in the means. But though his was a secondary, when it was not a secret, part, the year was to afford excellent practice for those gifts for private negotiation which in Mr. George are scarcely inferior to his capacity for popular appeal. They were first employed to secure the passage of his Budget. The Liberal party, the Irish, the Labour members, and indeed the country in general, had understood from Mr. Asquith's declaration before the election —'We shall not hold office unless we can secure the safeguards which experience shows to be necessary for the legislative utility and honour of the party of progress'—that he had already obtained 'guarantees' from the King—in other words, that he had been assured that if the Lords refused to pass a Bill limiting their own power of veto new Peers sufficient to make a majority for the passage of the measure would be created.

On the very day of the opening of Parliament, however, Mr. Asquith stated that he had neither asked for nor received such guarantees, and that it would have been improper to ask for them. The announcement caused bitter disappointment among the Radicals. But the immediate difficulty was with the Irish. The Government was now dependent on the Irish vote, and the Irish disliked many features of the Budget. They would have voted for it, or for anything else not touching their religion, if doing so meant removing the House of Lords from the path that led to Home Rule. But without a fair prospect of that they were sure to make trouble over the increased whisky duty, and they might even destroy the Government. Mr. George had an informal meeting with Messrs. Redmond and Dillon. It was a delicate affair to arrange. Mr. Redmond, it appears, was doubtful whether Mr. Asquith, Sir Edward Grey, or Mr. Haldane were really in earnest over Home Rule, but had no doubt as to the sincerity of Mr. Churchill and Mr. George, despite the former's friendship with the English friends of Ulster and the latter's well-known opportunism on the Irish question.* Mr. Redmond could not have been ignorant of the latter fact. What he really felt was, no doubt, that Mr. George was likely to be more anxious than Mr. Asquith to push matters to extremity against the Peers. Mr. Asquith had been 'demoralised by society;' Mr. George had not yet lost 'fifty per cent. of his Radicalism.' However the case, the negotiations were wholly successful; the support of the Irish was given in return for 'a promise in so many words'; and Mr. George was enabled to inform the House of Commons that the Government did not intend to 'plough the sands,' and would 'absolutely stake their existence on the advice they will give to the Sovereign, if ever it becomes necessary to do so.'

The Budget was thus secured. The Lords agreed that the verdict of the polls was on this matter decisive, and on April 29, exactly a year after its introduction, the Finance Bill received the Royal Assent. Those who watched the ceremony might be excused if they felt some satire on the Upper House in the formula 'Le roy remercie ses bons sujets, accepte leur benevolence, et ainsi le veut.' The ancient form might seem to emphasise the truth that in money matters the Crown and the people have direct relations, and that interference of the King's fair cousins the Peers is an impertinence.

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* 'My Diaries,' Wilfred Scawen Blunt.

In introducing the Parliament Bill early in April Mr. Asquith made the Government's position perfectly clear :

> 'If the Lords fail to accept our policy, or decline to consider it when it is formally presented to them, we shall feel it our duty immediately to tender advice to the Crown as to the steps which will have to be taken if that policy is to have statutory effect in this Parliament. . . . If we do not find ourselves in a position to ensure that statutory effect we shall then either resign our offices or recommend a dissolution of Parliament. Let me add this, that in no case should we recommend a dissolution except under such conditions as will secure that in the new Parliament the judgment of the people, as expressed at the election, will be carried into law.'

This was decisive so far as the Government was concerned. But it left the King's attitude uncertain. He may have thought that the issue had been quite unnecessarily forced by the Peers, but on all grounds he must have been extremely anxious that the quarrel should not be fought out. The temper of a peace-loving man, the statesmanship of a statesmanlike man, the natural horror which every monarch must feel at the very suggestion of a degradation of the patrician order, all inclined him to postpone the matter, since he could not for the moment see his way to settle it. He succeeded in keeping the politicians at arm's length until his return from Biarritz. Then he was confronted with the actual and imminent possibility of Mr. Asquith's resignation unless the contingent promise to create Peers were given. There were three constitutional alternatives to Mr. Asquith. But Mr. Balfour could not now command a majority, and could only obtain one by recourse to another election, which would obviously involve the most serious dangers; Lord Rosebery, also a constitutional possibility, was practically impossible from many points of view; there remained only Mr. George, who, even if the Whigs sulked in their tents, might carry on with the aid of Irish and Labour votes, and go to the country on an alarmingly 'advanced' programme with at least a sporting chance of success. One Lady C——,* who is apparently not without knowledge, declares that Mr. Asquith actually told the King that he ought to send for Mr. Lloyd George in his (Mr. Asquith's) place. 'This roused the King, who, as a rule, had good command over himself, for they all hate Lloyd George, and the King was quite upset by it. The King rather liked Churchill because he is a gentleman, but Lloyd George he would not stand.'

We may neglect the last allegation, though it is perhaps a fact of some significance that during the whole of King Edward's reign Mr. George never acted as 'Minister in attendance.' But if it be true that the King was 'upset' there were reasons more convincing than any personal want of liking. Mr. George was then considered in many quarters a demagogue of the most dangerous tendencies, and, whatever his real inclinations, he could hardly have succeeded to power in such circumstances without being forced to a policy of 'thorough.' In practice, therefore, the King must take his choice, if Mr. Asquith insisted on resignation in default of 'guarantees,' between accepting considerable present evils and flying to others altogether incalculable.

However the case, the King's death in the midst of the crisis changed the whole situation. A mass of emergency legislation was thrown on Parliament. Decency forbade that the sincere mourning of the nation should be interrupted, like the Shakespearean tragedy, by a 'knocking within.' It may be that Mr. George himself† first officially suggested an attempt to settle the constitutional issue by conference; it is certain that the idea of a 'truce of God' occurred spontaneously to many unofficial minds. For over five months the Conference remained in being, and though its proceedings have never been disclosed, there is every reason to believe that on the one side the complete control of finance by the Commons was conceded, while on the other there was a disposition to agree that in cases of difference on other matters decision should rest with a joint committee of both Houses, the Commons sending representatives in proportion to the strength of parties and the Lords an equal number of Liberal and Unionist Peers. The Unionists, however, wanted to except 'organic measures'; the real stumbling-block was of course the particular case of Home Rule. It is highly significant that, after some weeks, the possibility of a 'Federal Solution' was eagerly discussed by the journalistic prophets of the Unionist party, and the prospect of some arrangement on these lines reached, and was welcomed by, Mr. Redmond in Canada. We know that Federalism had long been a pet idea of Mr. George's. We know that in the words of a penetrating critic* he has a natural talent for Coalition, being 'at once an explosive of party union and a builder of flying bridges between incompatibles.' Was the plan which failed, but may have been so near success, that of the statesmen who throughout the nineties had talked of 'Home Rule all round' when all other politicians of any prominence were divided between Gladstonianism and blank negation?

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* Quoted in 'My Diaries,' Wilfred Scawen Blunt.

† This is stated as a fact by Harold Spender.

Though the Conference failed it left two important effects behind it. It was killed by the feeling of the Conservative back benches, which, imbued with Ulster sentiment, hardly distinguished between Federalism and any other brand of Home Rule. But these people could not undo the mischief which, from the genuinely Conservative point of view, had already been done. While the Conference was sitting the more lively spirits of the party had been busily engaged in thinking out a democratic policy for Conservatism. Great quantities of life-like grapes had been produced from the Tory thorn-bushes, and never did thistles produce such a crop of figs. But the result was that the programme-makers gave away most of the Unionist case, not only against Home Rule, but against payment of members and other Radical ideals. Sacred things had not been sold, but they had been discussed as saleable, and all the frenzy that followed could not alter that fact.

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* Mr. Herbert Sidebotham, 'Pillars of the State.'

The other effect was on the mind of Mr. George. The Conference gave him for the first time the opportunity of knowing his enemies as well as he knew his friends; already a little repelled by the frigidity of the Manchester school, and the haughtiness of the Whig notables, in his own party, he was in a mood to appreciate the well-developed, bustling, progressive 'stunt'-loving element in Unionism. Between him and such Conservatives as Mr. Walter Long there could be no sympathy. But he could appreciate Mr. Balfour, and he was spiritually akin, some superficial differences notwithstanding, to men like Mr. F. E. Smith. He had always shown a lively sense of the soul of Whiggish evil in things Radically good. He now found that people could call themselves Conservatives, and think very much like Socialists; and one more step had been taken on the road which, after many twists and turns, was to lead him to the control of a mixed Government.

During the Conference Mr. George, except for one acrid speech against landlords, had preserved the truce, but when Mr. Asquith proclaimed a 'state of war,' he returned with vivacity to his attack on 'the Dukes.' At Mile End he compared the landlords to 'clods';* at Edinburgh he declared that the House of Lords was 'founded on snobbery.' But though the style was as vigorous as before, the effect of the orator was not quite the same. There was, indeed, nothing new for him to say. Granted that the House of Lords was as bad as ever, it could not be shown that in twelve months it had grown any worse. Mr. George had, in fact, ceased for the time to be the dominating figure. Mr. Asquith was the attacker, Mr. Redmond the object of counter-attack; and the main battlefield offered little scope for Mr. George's special abilities, since he knew very little about constitutional niceties and cared very little about Home Rule. Some little doubt existed whether, in view of the expanding abilities of Mr. Churchill, he still occupied even second place among Liberal Ministers, and there is a slightly pathetic note in his declaration just before the polls to a friendly interviewer* that he was not a Socialist. He speaks with the embarrassed irrelevance of a simple country lady out of her depth at a highly-intellectual tea-party, unwilling to keep silence and yet unable to follow the drift of the conversation :—

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* So the word is printed in all Reports. But it is not uninteresting to note that a weekly review accounted for the specially vehement applause by suggesting that another word of similar sound, with which Mile End was no doubt at least equally familiar, had been used by the orator. There is not, of course, the smallest evidence to this effect, and the incident is merely mentioned to illustrate the strength of feeling against Mr. George at the time and the willingness to use any weapon against him.

> 'I want things done. I want dreams, but dreams which are realisable. I want aspiration and discontent leading to a real paradise and a real earth in which men can live here and now, and fulfil the destiny of the human race. I want to make life better and kinder and safer—now at this moment. Suffering is too close to me. Misery is too near and insistent. Injustice is too obvious and glaring. Danger is too present.'

The English interviewer found Mr. George no Socialist. M. Jean Longuet, who spoke to him shortly afterwards, was convinced that on land nationalisation he was 'prepared in his heart to go to the lengths of our Socialistic solution,' and that he had the 'revolutionary mysticism of Cromwell's soldiers.' This misapprehension was considered sufficiently serious to necessitate a special interview with *Le Matin*, in which Mr. George, for the comfort of the French bourgeois mind, averred that the Government had every intention of maintaining a Navy that would keep our command of the sea unchallenged. Everything thus ended well, and Mr. George had the best of both possible worlds;

* Mr. Harold Begbie.

with the English Radicals he still stood for reduced armaments; in France he was the man who would never let the German fleet be a menace to the Entente Powers. In all probability he had not yet made up his mind which policy to plump for, and it so happened that several years were to elapse before he could end this state of indecision.

The further stages of the constitutional struggle have but little relevance to this narrative. In this matter Mr. Asquith was not merely the Liberal leader, he was the Liberal party personified; in the conduct of the Parliament Bill through the House of Commons, in the manœuvres and negotiations which permitted Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Balfour to escape, though with heavy losses, from the full catastrophe of defeat, Mr. Asquith alone counted. What little help he accepted from subordinates came from Mr. Churchill. Mr. Lloyd George was excluded. His health, overstrained by the election, kept him for some weeks from the House of Commons, and later he was engaged on his Insurance scheme. In the central drama there was no place for him; Mr. Asquith, anxious to carry his point without a hint of revolutionary violence, preferred not to trust his volatile lieutenant. Discipline in the Asquith Cabinets was normally rather lax, but on this occasion no chances were taken. It was part of the Asquithian plan that all the sobriety and correctitude should be on the side of innovation and that all the froth and fury should be on the side of the *status quo*.

Nevertheless the year 1911 was an important and successful one for Mr. Lloyd George. He passed a first-class measure destined profoundly to affect the whole social life of the country; he won great popular credit, and the personal thanks of the King, by the settlement of an alarming railway strike; by a simple resolution of the House of Commons he gave every member a salary of four hundred a year; he made his first important announcement on foreign affairs; and altogether he more than made up the ground lost in 1910.

His first task was the National Insurance Bill, which was deemed an uncontroversial measure, and therefore outside the arrangement that no contentious business should be taken until the constitutional question had been settled. That so great a revolution should have been thus regarded may seem singular, in view of the fierce and protracted conflicts over questions arousing much less feeling in the country. But the younger school of Conservatism had a nervous dread of touching any Radical consignment labelled 'Social Reform,' and those less sympathetic believed that in opposing the Bill they would occupy 'unfavourable ground.' Moreover, there was a disposition to think that the actual scheme might have been very much worse. It was, in the first place, contributory, imposing obligations on the employed person as well as on his employer and the State. Secondly, its paternalism was no more repugnant to the philosophy of Young England Toryism than to that of Fabian Socialism. On the other hand, it should have been wholly abhorrent to Liberalism, and indeed to any school of thought which laid stress on the equality before the law of all citizens, since it taxed one class to pay for privileges denied them, and imposed on another class obligations from which the rest of the community was free. There had already been, it is true, legislation, like the Employers' Liability Act, which recognised the differing status of 'employed person' and 'employer'; but never before had the distinction between rich and poor, or between poor and a little less poor, been so frankly declared as ground for differential administrative and legislative treatment.

The Bill was described at the time, by a downright critic,* as leading 'straight to slavery.' It was certainly borrowed directly from Germany, where the liberty of the individual has never been highly regarded. But English Liberalism had undergone a strange metamorphosis; the practical politician of every camp scorned 'doctrinaire' objections; and Mr. George, in introducing the Bill, was no doubt justified, so far as the 'progressive' part of the House of Commons was concerned, in declaring that it contained nothing which could cause 'legitimate offence to the reasonable susceptibilities of any party.' For the rest, he declared that it was a measure 'that will relieve untold misery in myriads of homes—misery that is undeserved; that will help to prevent a great deal of wretchedness, and that will arm the nation to fight until it conquers "the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the destruction that wasteth at noonday."' As such no less a Unionist dignitary than Mr. F. E. Smith declared that failure to pass it in 'some form or other' would be an 'unparalleled misfortune.'

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* In the *New Age*.

Such opposition as there was came from the ordinary Englishman, and still more from the ordinary Englishwoman. Woman, according to Meredith, will be the last thing civilised by man; the domestic servant, for once in complete accord with her mistress, rose in revolt, and a confused clamour arose from all sorts of people who, without clearly understanding what the Bill was about, had gathered the essential fact that it meant very certain payments and rather uncertain benefits. The most serious trouble, however, was with the doctors, who naturally wanted to drive a harder bargain with the State than they had done with the voluntary friendly societies. Mr. George had a long and anxious fight with the faculty. Speaking of a conference with their representatives, 'I do not think,' he declared,* 'that there has been anything like it since the days when Daniel went into the lions' den. I was on the dissecting table for two hours.' He did not care for this 'wrangle in the sick-room;' it was unpleasant and might well become unseemly, and he proceeded to argue that six shillings a head, denounced by the doctors as too little and by the Friendly Societies as too much, was about right.

Ultimately he agreed to pay the doctors something more than he had proposed and something less than they had asked. In these negotiations he was well served by Dr. Christopher Addison, a Liberal member whose fortunes for some years were to be closely linked with his own. This difficulty surmounted, the Bill had a smooth passage. While many Unionists exploited its unpopularity in the constituencies, all, or nearly all, languidly blessed it in the House of Commons. The Labour Party was at first doubtful. But Mr. Ramsay Macdonald brought his little group of intellectuals on to its side, and from that moment dates the definite alignment of Labour with bureaucratic control and against the liberty of the individual. Though the Bill was denounced in the country as 'the cheats' charter,' the 'most hated Bill,' and the 'malingerers' millennium,' the Lords gave no trouble, but many of their ladies did. The Servants' Tax Resisters' Defence Association held a meeting, supported by more than one Peeress, at which Mr. George was denounced as 'tyrant, gagger, guillotiner,' and as endeavouring to do things unimagined by the 'worst kings in the darkest ages of British history.' This agitation was, oddly enough, the most effective apart from that of the professional men. It died not so much from its own futility, for there was a great deal of genuine and justified feeling behind it, as from the unnatural character of the alliance between maids and mistresses. For a time London saw the miracle of Duchesses and their footmen on the same platform—or more generally at the same drawing-room meeting—but long it could not be. A fear seemed suddenly to invade the aristocratic breast that the servants might imbibe 'ideas,' and become too 'independent.' At any rate the agitation suddenly subsided, and the threatened revolt against the Bill after it had become law failed to materialise in any marked degree.

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* At Birmingham in June, 1911.

Some months later,* Mr. George complained bitterly of the treatment he had received over this 'uncontroversial measure.' The Act, he said, 'mobilised the nation' for the first time, to wage war not upon their fellow-men, but 'for the purpose of securing health, for securing plenty, and for driving away the privation and hunger which had invaded millions of homes.' But how had it been received?

> 'They have assailed it with misrepresentations, with falsehoods, direct, unqualified. . . . They have assailed its author in a way, I believe, that no Minister has been assailed in my time. My

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* At a mass meeting in South London.

> race, my origin—they are all the topics of their vituperation. I am proud of both. There is one quality that my little race has that gives them peculiar offence, especially the dullest among them, and that is the gift of imagination. . . . I can see now the humble homes of the people with the dark clouds of anxiety, disease, distress, privation, hanging heavily over them. And I can see another vision. I can see the Old Age Pension Act, the National Insurance Act, and many another Act in their trail descending, like breezes from the hills of my native land, sweeping into the mist-laden valleys, and clearing the gloom away until the rays of God's sun have pierced the narrowest window.'

A prospectus is generally better reading than a balance sheet, and the great Insurance Act has not actually justified the expectations thus eloquently expressed. But whatever may be thought of its merits, it was an admirable specimen of Mr. George's practice of legislating for the 'interests concerned.' He satisfied, or attempted to satisfy, the large employers, whom the Act might relieve of many responsibilities, and still more of any burden of conscience; the employees, to the mass of whom, possibly, there were benefits outweighing vexations; the doctors, to whom the Act was a guarantee of stable income. The country as a whole, which had to pay for the measure, was never even considered.

Meanwhile, in the middle of the summer of 1911, Mr. George appeared dramatically in a wholly new character. For the first time in his life he used, in the position of a great Minister, speaking the mind of a Government, that kind of language which resounds, in menace or encouragement, all over the world. Moroccan affairs had already involved, as long before as 1905, an acute crisis between Germany and France. The Algeciras Conference had left Germany silenced but unsatisfied, and now she saw her opportunity in the rapidly developing anarchy in British politics.

Internal trouble among the Moorish tribes had obliged France to send troops inland to Fez. The German Colonial party immediately declared that 'compensation' must be obtained elsewhere, and at the beginning of July the German Government despatched a gunboat to the Moorish port of Agadir.

This blackmailing enterprise—for such quite simply it was—came at a dangerous time. England was in the midst of the Constitutional crisis, and, adopting a bad fashion which rapidly became worse, a great number of people were already talking about armed resistance. In France the Government of M. Caillaux, one of the small minority of Frenchmen who believed in a cordial understanding with Germany, might quite conceivably have agreed to some arrangement fatal to the Entente with Great Britain. Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, quickly seized the nature of the situation. He knew that Germany had announced to the French Ambassador in Berlin that a large slice of the French Congo would secure her complaisance elsewhere. On July 21 Mr. Lloyd George was due to speak at the Mansion House, and after an unsatisfactory interview with the German Ambassador, Sir Edward prepared a carefully considered statement for him to include in his address. Therefore, on that night, after some remarks on national economy, Mr. George said:—

> 'But I am bound also to say this—that I believe it is essential in the highest interests not merely of this country but of the world, that Britain should at all hazards maintain her place and prestige among the great nations of the world. Her potent influence has many a time in the past been, and may yet be in the future, invaluable to the cause of human liberty. It has more than once in the past redeemed Continental nations, who are sometimes apt to forget that service, from overwhelming disaster and even from international extinction. I would make great sacrifices to preserve peace. I conceive that nothing would justify a disturbance of international goodwill except questions of the

> gravest national moment. But if a situation were to be forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved by the surrender of the great and beneficent position Britain has won by centuries of heroism and achievement, by allowing Britain to be treated, when her interests were vitally affected, as if she were of no account in the Cabinet of nations, then I say emphatically that peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure. National honour is no party question. The security of our great international trade is no party question. The peace of the world is much more likely to be secured if all nations realise fairly what the conditions of peace must be.'

The consequences of this speech were considerable. At home, in the noise and confusion of the domestic quarrel, the impression could not be durable. But in Germany the words of Mr. George, especially because they appeared to be his own words, caused a wholesome shock. In disclaiming intentions of creating a German port on the Moroccan coast, the German Ambassador demanded an explanation of Mr. George's speech. Sir Edward Grey stiffly declined to give one, and met a tone of unusual insolence with a tone of unusual acrimony. In France the speech caused even more stir. It was not of course known that Mr. George was being used as the mouthpiece of another, and his utterance gained in significance because he was generally regarded as an advocate of peace at any price. It was thus a straight answer to M. Caillaux' theory that there was no reality in the Entente, and that France would be better advised to make peace with her enemy when she was in the way with him. The speech did not, indeed, prevent 'conversations' which ended in a rather humiliating cession of French territory to Germany. But it led in the long run to the downfall of the Caillaux Government, and thereafter the Entente was safe.

Nor can it be doubted that the Mansion House speech deeply and permanently affected Mr. Lloyd George himself. For some eighteen months he had inclined towards revision of his former notions on the futility of preparing against 'nightmares.' Now he had committed himself to the view that there really was such a thing as a German menace, and Sir Edward Grey, in inducing him to make a declaration on external policy, had won a remarkable victory. It was not merely that he was for the future bound by his own declarations. That in itself was little. Mr. George has what Lord Hugh Cecil described* as the 'opalesque' mind, liable to constant change, and, like the late Joseph Chamberlain, is never embarrassed by the ghosts of his dead selves. He might still, and in fact he did—on the very eve of the Great War—relapse into Pacificism. The real effect of the Agadir speech was more subtle. Mr. George had suddenly discovered the fascination of foreign affairs.

After the Agadir speech he could hardly fail to feel a greater man than before. Hitherto he had been steadily increasing his area of influence, but it was after all still parochial, though the parish was as large as England. First he had impressed a few Welsh villages; next he had made his name resound throughout the Principality; next he had conquered the English Radicals. He had successively enjoyed the horror and alarm of Welsh Bishops, Whig politicians, landlords, and Peers. Now there was a new thrill; in every European Chancellory his words had awakened vivid emotion of one kind or another. It is not unreasonable to credit him with something of the rapture which must have seized on the directors of great popular newspapers when they first discovered that foreign affairs might after all excite more sensation than the prettiest murder. Such feelings would not of course be acknowledged even to himself, but they were there, and the post-Agadir Lloyd George could only be a rather different person from the Lloyd George of the Budget campaign. He might still be irresponsible, but he could no longer be unconsciously irresponsible in the old ingenuous way. He might still be parochial when profit lay in that, and he would certainly be always the astute electioneer. But he must henceforth have a respect for foreign things, an interest in them, a sense of their moment, a vivid impression of the personal glory and dignity of dealing with them. He would hardly want Sir Edward Grey's position without something of Sir Edward Grey's knowledge, though that might be less than some imagined. But he would hardly have been human had he not pictured to himself that it would be pleasant to be Sir Edward Grey's master; to inspire rather than to reproduce words which startled the world, momentarily united all parties at home, and made national leaders of mere party politicians. Agadir was a new spiritual birth for Mr. George. Like all young things, the thing born was a little misshapen and not a little capricious, but it was gifted with vitality, and it grew.

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* In the House of Commons, Feb. 17, 1922.

The troublesome question of women's suffrage had annoyed Mr. George, like other Ministers, ever since the election of 1906, in which so many members of the Liberal Party had given thoughtless pledges which the women interpreted with deadly seriousness. In 1910 he had opposed the so-called Conciliation Bill, as tending merely to strengthen Conservatism. In 1911 he voted for another measure of enfranchisement on the ground that it was 'more democratic'; and at a Conference of the National Liberal Federation at Bristol he endeavoured to convert his party to the women's cause; but the effect of his oratory was a good deal spoiled by exhibitions of temper on the part of sundry militants. His efforts, indeed, won small gratitude. Many of the suffragists did not trust him; many hated him for political reasons unconnected with the vote. He had, of course, also to share the unpopularity attaching to any supporter of Mr. Asquith, then the chief enemy of the female vote. When he addressed a meeting of the Women Liberals' Federation one woman aimed a bundle of pamphlets at his head, while a male sympathiser threw a stone which struck his face.

Mr. George, however, took a philosophically long view. Foreseeing that some day the women might very well succeed, he returned good for evil by continuing to speak on their behalf, and eventually won his reward.

CHAPTER XI

In one of his short stories Mr. Kipling, desiring to convey an impression of some swift sky effect, says it was as if an enormous egg had suddenly been thrown with great violence against a colossal barn-door. Unhappily, no such vivid imagery is available in describing political phenomena. The great land scheme of Mr. Lloyd George, which makes a yellow splash across the history of the two years before the Great War, is very much like this smashed egg. We know very little about it before it got smashed, for the cluckings which accompanied and followed the laying of it were rather triumphant than descriptive, and after it came into contact with the barn-door it became merely an irritating, if impressive, presence,—a mess, in fact, that insisted in getting mixed up with all sorts of other things. The trouble of the present writer is that he cannot conscientiously follow the advice of Uncle Toby concerning such disfigurements, wipe it up and say nothing more about it. For it had so much influence on Mr. George's attitude up to the great crisis of his career that, while it is hopeless to attempt intelligent criticism, the thing cannot be wholly ignored.

Mr. George, it seems, had designed a sequel to the Budget of 1909. 'Those who knew Mr. George's mind in those days,' says one who was among his most enthusiastic admirers in 1912,* 'knew also that he foresaw and planned a first rejection by the Lords, an endorsement by the country, and a following attack on the veto, in which the peers were bound, whatever their tactics, to succumb. All went well as this simple, though far from shallow generalship foresaw.† But while nothing miscarried, the resulting situation was a difficult one.' Was, asked the writer, in this first week of 1912, the Budget to have its sequel—the 'transformation of British agriculture through the three roads of a reform of the land laws and land taxation, the further reform of housing, and the State control of the railway system?'

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* H. W. M. in *The Nation.*

† Compare Chapter VIII.

Presumably this was the hoped for result of a successful incubation of Mr. George's great land scheme egg. But there were two troubles. The first was the state of Government business, which delayed the sitting process, the second was a personal accident through which the egg was smashed.

The Government had commitments to which precedence could hardly be denied. In the first place there was the introduction of the Home Rule Bill, in which Mr. George acquiesced, though without fervour. Indeed, his silence in the House and the country evoked bitter remark in Ireland; it was described as 'amazing,' and not at all the requital to be expected, in view of the help the Irish had given in the passing of the Budget and the Insurance Act.*

On the claims of Wales there could be, outwardly at least, no such coolness, and when Mr. McKenna introduced the Disestablishment Bill Mr. George was eloquent on behalf of 'the great Nonconformist body which picked Wales out of the Slough of Perdition.' The effort was described by a Conservative opponent† as simply 'an old-fashioned Church and Chapel speech.' But the very similarity to the utterances of twenty years before emphasised the difference. Mr. George then spoke with the genuine fire and force of a fanatic. He now spoke like one who is expected to be a fanatic but is not in fact the least fanatical. There was all the difference between a real attack of epilepsy and the contortions of a soap-chewing pretender. Only once was the old note sounded, and that, significantly enough, was when he dealt with some question of land filched in ancient days from the Church by ancestors of his political opponents. Thus when the Duke of Devonshire described the policy of the Government as 'robbery of God,' the retort came swift and bitter that the foundations of the Duke's own fortunes were 'desecrated shrines and pillaged altars.'

* *Irish Independent.*

† Mr. Ormsby Gore.

> 'Look at the story of the pillage of the Reformation. They robbed the Church, they robbed the monasteries, they robbed the almshouses, they robbed the poor, and they robbed the dead. Then they come here, when we are trying to recover some part of this pillaged property for the poor, to whom it was originally given, and they venture, with hands dripping from the fat of sacrilege, to accuse us of the robbery of God.'

On such secular aspects of the quarrel Mr. George could still revive the old fury. But it was nevertheless clear that he would not be sorry to find a way out without recourse to long and doubtful Parliamentary warfare, and his efforts to reach an accommodation with his former enemy, the Bishop of St. Asaph, caused some disquiet to colleagues eager for the Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill. Apart from his natural disposition to compromise, he wanted a clear field for a warfare on what he believed to be a far more living issue. Once, indeed, the Bill was very nearly dropped. Towards the end of a very crowded session the Prime Minister proposed to the Cabinet that it should be jettisoned, and Mr. George, with the majority of Ministers, appeared willing to bow to his chief's judgment. When the meeting had concluded, however, Mr. McKenna, who was a member for a Welsh constituency as well as the Minister in charge of the Bill, remained behind, with the evident intention of protesting. This action was not lost on Mr. George, who also returned, and, finding Mr. Asquith and Mr. McKenna engaged in serious discussion, lodged his own protest against abandonment. The double pressure sufficed, and Mr. Asquith returned to his desk to work out a new timetable.

But it was not on this cookery of thrice-boiled cabbage that Mr. George's heart was set. He was anxious to get forward with the Land scheme. At Walthamstow, after telling the audience how grateful it should be for the Insurance Act, he went on :—

> 'Oh, there is a great task in front of us. . . . A bigger task than democracy has ever yet

> undertaken in this land. You have got to free the land—the land that is to this day shackled with the chains of feudalism. We have got to free the people from the anxieties, the worries, the terrors—the terrors that they ought never to be called upon to face—terrors that their children may be crying for bread in this land of plenty. We have got to free the land from that. It is our shame. It is a disgrace to this, the richest land under the sun, that they should want; that is a contingency which no honest, thrifty man in this land should have to face. The Insurance Act is a beginning, and, with God's help, it is but a beginning.'

In a message to the Liberal candidate for a Cheshire seat, he declared that the Government 'looked forward to further progress along the path of reform in the direction of freeing the land system of this country from the bondage of monopoly and privilege.' But in fact the Government showed no such inclination. The situation, indeed, strongly resembled that of 1903. Like Mr. Chamberlain, Mr. Lloyd George had an idea which he was anxious to force on the country—an idea which he thought practically sound and electorally profitable. Like Mr. Balfour, Mr. Asquith could not help thinking that, however admirable the idea in itself, its right place was a Departmental pigeon-hole. Had things taken an ordinary course, this incompatibility would probably have developed, and the parallel might have been completed by Mr. George's resignation and a Liberal split. But the whole position was altered by what was known as the Marconi case. During many months the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and two of his intimate friends, were in the position of men whose conduct is under inquiry. Resignation during this period would have been political suicide. Nor was the position much more favourable afterwards, for though the personal honour of Mr. George was vindicated confidence in his judgment had been somewhat shaken, and his influence in the party temporarily diminished. It is thus quite possible that the whole current of his public life was deflected by a small private investment.

During the second half of 1912 there had been much mysterious reference in the Press to alleged Ministerial gambling in the shares of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company, and on October 11, when Mr. Herbert Samuel, then Postmaster-General, proposed to refer the agreement with that Company to a Select Committee, an attack on Ministers was made by Mr. George Lansbury, the Socialist Member for Bow and Bromley. 'I make no charges,' he said, 'against any individual, but I say that there has been disgraceful, scandalous gambling in these shares, caused by the fact that some people had previous knowledge of what the Government were going to do.'

Mr. Samuel indignantly declared that neither he nor his colleagues had ever held a shilling in the shares of the company. Mr. George, observing that he came to the House because he had heard what was said outside, demanded that this charge should be formulated. 'The reason,' he said, 'why the Government wanted a frank discussion before going to Committee was that we wanted to bring here these rumours, these sinister rumours that have been passed from one foul lip to another behind the backs of the House.' Sir Rufus Isaacs, the Attorney-General, added an emphatic denial, and there for the moment the matter ended.

But in February 1913, the indiscretion of a French paper having a London office gave Ministers the opportunity of resorting to the law. *Le Matin*, of Paris, had published a paragraph which may be translated as follows :—

> 'A very gross scandal occupies the English Press. Some time ago the English Government signed a contract with the Marconi Company by which the Company bound itself for a large consideration—a too large consideration, I am told—to connect by wireless all the British possessions with the Metropolis.
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> 'Mr. Leo Maxse, the eminent editor of the

> *National Review,* protested sharply against the way in which this Agreement had been concluded. He let it be understood that Mr. Herbert Samuel, Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, who had had the idea of entering into negotiations with the company, had come to an agreement with Sir Rufus Isaacs, Attorney-General, also a member of the Government, and brother to Mr. Godfrey Isaacs, director of the Marconi Company. All three are represented to have bought (auraient acheté) shares in the Company at the average price of 50 francs, which was their quoted price before the opening of negotiations with the Government, and to have sold them (auraient révendu) at a profit of anything up to 200 francs per share when progress of negotiations enabled conclusion of the contract to be foreseen.'

The two Ministers named brought an action for libel against the French newspaper. No defence was attempted, and full apology was offered for the indiscretion of the correspondent; but naturally the matter could not be slurred over. Lengthy statements were made both by Mr. Samuel and by Sir Rufus Isaacs, the latter of which alone has relevance to this narrative. In regard to the negotiations for a contract, he said :—

'I was never consulted. . . . I never saw any person with reference to the contract until, a few days before March 8th, 1912,* at a family function, my brother† told me he expected or hoped in the next few days to get a contract with the Government. . . . I never bought a share in the Marconi Company either before or after or at any time. I have never held a share, I have never had an interest in a share either directly or indirectly, I have never had an interest in any option or any syndicate. I do not know of any other form I could suggest of an interest in shares, but whatever it was I had it not.'

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* The Marconi Company's tender was accepted by the Government on March 7th.

† Mr. Godfrey Isaacs.

But Sir Rufus went on to explain that on April 17th* he had bought from another brother, Mr. Harry Isaacs, a ship and fruit broker in the City of London, ten thousand shares in the American Marconi Company. His Counsel, Sir Edward Carson, then asked, 'Did you sell 1,000 to Mr. Lloyd George and 1,000 to the Master of Elibank?'† Sir Rufus replied:—

> 'Yes. I told them. I was living on very intimate terms with them; we are great personal friends, and I told them what I had done. I told them what I knew about the American Marconi Company, and that I should not have gone into it unless I was satisfied that it had nothing whatever to do with the Marconi Company, or with any contract that had been made or might be made with the British Government. I told them I thought it was a very good investment, and they took 1,000 shares from me at the same price as I had paid for them. I do not know that they had ever heard of the American Company. I am quite sure they would never have gone into it except for what I told them. I sold 3,570. That sale afforded a profit. Having now 6,430 left, I should have a loss of from £1,100 to £1,200 if I sold at the present moment. That applies to the whole 10,000. That is the net result of all the transactions I have ever had in Marconi or any other wireless enterprise.'

Sir Edward Carson then asked what was the position of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Lord Murray.‡ 'They stand,' said Sir Rufus, 'in about the same position—they have lost a few hundreds each.'

Mr. Lloyd George's account of the affair was given later before a Select Committee appointed by the House of Commons. As was almost inevitable, members of the Committee took up strongly contrasted attitudes based on party differences. There was a section which aimed at impartiality. There was a section, notably represented by Lord Robert Cecil, which was clearly concerned to make the most of the facts. There was another section equally disposed to minimise the facts, and to act the part of that whitewashing committee which Camille Desmoulins, early in the French Revolution, compared to a piece of blotting paper :—'Vous enlevez la tache, et la tache vous reste.' In the presence of these inquisitors Mr. George bore himself gallantly enough, but his care-worn features showed abundant signs that the ordeal was not light, and it was noticed that for the first time his hair had gone distinctly grey and that he was forced habitually to use pince-nez.

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* The formal contract between the Government and the Marconi Company was entered into on July 19th and came before Parliament on August 7th.

† The Chief Liberal Whip at the time of the transaction.

‡ The Master of Elibank had received a Peerage on retirement.

He added, as to the transaction itself, little to the statement of the Attorney-General. Of the thousand shares, he sold, on the advice of his stock-broker, five hundred on April 20th, and on May 3rd Sir Rufus sold another block of 314 for him. These transactions left a profit of about £750 and the unsold shares, but on May 22nd he and the Master of Elibank had bought between them another 3,000, also in the American Marconi Company. These they had retained.

The most generally interesting part of the Chancellor's statement was that in which he protested, with considerable emotion, against suggestions far wider than the actual allegations. People were talking about his being a very wealthy man, about his owning mansions in Surrey and Wales and villas in the South of France, and there were hints in newspaper articles that he could not possibly have saved the money out of his five thousand a year. With indignation in his voice and gesture the Minister proceeded :—

> 'I have devoted so much of my time to politics that, although I have a profession, supposed to be lucrative, I never made the most of it; I only practised it just to make a living. When

> a man becomes a Minister he is given a substantial salary, and it was very substantial to me, having regard to the life I had led up to that time as a humble solicitor. . . . But remember this. Every Minister knows his position is provisional and his glories transitory, and he has to take that into account, and must think of the time when others, more worthy than himself, will fill the same position. . . . There are those to be considered whom he will leave behind. . . . With regard to that I, therefore, had to consider—what every Minister has to consider in my position—not to live quite up to my income, but to set something aside; and I have done it. I have invested. . . . My total investments bring me about four hundred a year. That is my great fortune. That is all I could leave if I went down.
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> 'With regard to mansions, I have only one house which I can call my own. It became clear, because of recent occurrences, that the "great mansion" down at Walton Heath was not mine at all. They blew up somebody else's property before I even had the lease of it. I am sorry to say that some of the Press have been doing their very best to create a wrong impression. I have seen photographs taken at such an angle as to make it look a sort of royal palace. The house, including the land, is worth only £2,000. I have one house in Wales. Cannot a man fifty years of age have one house to call his own? It is rather hard. I built a house three or four years ago. I was so busy with the Budget that I could not even spend my salary, and built it more or less from my salary. That is my mansion. That is all I have got in the world.'

For the rest Mr. Lloyd George gave an interesting glimpse of his relations with the other Ministers at the time of the investment. The Master of Elibank had lived under the roof of 11 Downing Street 'for weeks, if not months.' As for Sir Rufus Isaacs, he said, 'We had meals together, and I think golf and transactions of that kind.' That was the real reason the Master of Elibank was brought in. 'We were not picking Ministers here and there, but simply because we happened to be in the same rooms and were constantly together.'

In June 1913, the Committee published its finding. The Majority Report dealt not at all in censure, and little in criticism. The Minority Report, which bore the impress of party feeling, made the following points :—

> (1) The purchases of April 17th were made when the shares could not have been bought in the ordinary way on the Stock Exchange, and at a lower price than ordinary members of the public could have bought them. Sir Rufus Isaacs had obtained these advantages because he took these shares from Mr. Harry Isaacs, who had had them on still more advantageous terms from Mr. Godfrey Isaacs.
>
> (2) The Marconi Company of America was indirectly but materially interested in the conclusion of the agreement between the English Marconi Company and the British Government.
>
> (3) The transactions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer were in the main rather in the nature of speculation than of investment.
>
> (4) The persistence of rumours had been largely due to the reticence of Ministers.

The Report signed by the Chairman* also declared that there was a vital connection between the British and the American Company. All members of the Committee were agreed that :

> 'No Minister, official, or Member of Parliament has been influenced in the discharge of his public duties by reason of any interest he might have had in any of the Marconi or other undertakings connected with wireless telegraphy, or utilised information given to him from official sources

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* Sir Albert Spicer, a Liberal M.P.

> for the purpose of investment or speculation in any such undertakings.'

Thus the honour of Ministers was cleared by unanimous finding, and the House of Commons, in the subsequent debate, showed no disposition to take another view. Both the Attorney-General and the Chancellor of the Exchequer made statements which deeply moved the House. That of Mr. Lloyd George was especially charged with deep emotion. 'I have been,' he said, 'a member of the House for twenty-three years. I have spent most of my active life in the service of the House, and I should be deeply grieved indeed if the House of Commons thought I . . . had been lacking in frankness and openness in dealing with it.' An interruption struck a spark from him. 'These charges,' he cried, 'have been exploded, but the deadly after-damp remains,' and for a moment he spoke bitterly of the inquisition to which he had been submitted :—

> 'I wonder how any member would care to go through the ordeal which the Attorney-General and myself have gone through during the last few months. . . But it was not these things which gave me most pain—it was the anxiety, both inside and outside this House, of those who have been comrades of mine in great struggles. Nothing has pierced me more deeply than the apprehension lest some thoughtlessness should have put in jeopardy causes which I have been brought up to believe in as a religious faith. I am conscious of having done nothing to bring a slur upon the honour of Ministers of the Crown. Perhaps I acted thoughtlessly, perhaps I acted carelessly, perhaps I acted mistakenly, but I acted innocently, I acted openly, I acted honestly.'

This view was taken by nearly three hundred and fifty members of the House, who voted against the resolution of Mr. (afterwards Viscount) Cave expressing regret that the Ministers had engaged in these transactions, and had not shown more frankness in their communications with the House. Mr. Balfour declared that 'no flutter should be indulged in by your Chancellor of the Exchequer.' Mr. Bonar Law considered Ministers had been 'lacking in moral courage.' No responsible person was found to go further, and the quietness with which the public received the subsequent appointment of Sir Rufus Isaacs as Lord Chief Justice seemed to indicate that the country shared the view of the majority of the House of Commons.

Mr. George himself, once the shadow had passed, quickly recovered his elasticity of spirits, and indeed displayed a defiant temper contrasting strangely with his late humility. On July 31st he declared his belief that a deliberate conspiracy was on foot to 'overthrow democratic Government.' A certain Peer, it seemed, had promised when he went out of office to roast an ox in his park. 'Let him not get too near the fire,' said Mr. George, 'or there may be an unhappy and painful mistake over the victim.' 'I feel,' he declared, in one of his characteristic figures, 'like a petrel that has been breasting an angry sea and has been riding in a fierce tempest and has just come to rest, a foot on the friendly rocks of his native shore; but I am sailing back immediately into the hurricane, for it is my element.' About this time, indeed, he revelled in images taken from Buffon or the Bible. The Insurance Act, stoned by the Conservatives, was 'doing the work of the Man of Nazareth.'* He had been fighting with beasts at Ephesus,† but before they had finished they would be sorry they had begun the attack. Like Samson, he had slaughtered the hideous monster which had sought his life, and 'out of the carcase would come something that would sweeten the life of millions.' He was like Sebastian, who had his hands tied behind his back, while arrows were shot into him from all sides.‡

But clearly, though his hands might be free—

'free to shield, free to smite, not for myself, but

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* Speech at Ashfield-in-Sutton, Notts.

† Speech at Carnarvon.

‡ Luncheon of congratulation at the National Liberal Club.

> for the cause I believe in, which I have devoted my life to, and which I am going on with'—

Mr. George's position was much less simple than if there had been no such thing as this 'shabbiest chapter in the history of any party,' as he described the attack which had compelled him and his friends 'to sit silent, while calumny from every quarter was being hurled at our heads.' He could hardly leave the Cabinet without being misunderstood, and the Prime Minister, who had defended him with equal skill and staunchness, was obviously not ready to embark on an attempt to add revolutionary land legislation to his already great and accumulating difficulties over Ireland.

Thus the land campaign when launched really resembled what it has been called—a smashed egg—and the oratory gave the impression—lurid but confused—of the barn door of Mr. Kipling's picturesque image. The speech at Bedford in the autumn of 1913 proved to be little more than an attack on the game laws. Mr. George, with his early impressions still vivid, could speak vehemently enough on this subject, but after all it was only a fraction of the whole question, and the immediate result was simply to provoke a controversy, welcome to ornithologists, but not generally important, on the habits of the pheasant:

> 'There is no country in Europe where so much cultivable land is given up entirely to sport. No country in the world where cultivable and even highly cultivated land is so over-run and so continuously damaged by game. . . . In 1851 you had in this country 9,000 game-keepers. In 1911 there were 23,000. During that period the number of labourers had gone down by 600,000. Take a copy of *The Field* to-day and you will see advertisements about shooting rights over estates where last year 5,000 pheasants were caught. . . . We have complaints from farmers in every part of the country that their crops have been damaged by the game. Here is one farmer who was sowing his crop—it was a field

> of mangolds. The man assured me there was not one mangold out of a dozen which was not pecked and destroyed by pheasants. Where you should have got 35 tons, you could not have more than 10 tons. It was not worth the expense and labour of carting.'

Mr. Lloyd George spoke also of rural housing, of security of tenure for the farmer, of half-holidays and better wages for the labourer; but how, when, and by what means these desirable things were to be achieved was left a matter of doubt. Mention of them was, indeed, almost as incidental as the reference to Mr. Leo Maxse as 'the cat's meat man of the Tory Party.' On game Mr. George seemed to have determined to concentrate, and even so for a country-bred man his talk of 'caught' pheasants and their addiction to the mangold wurzel was not a little urban in its innocence. Conservative insistence on the latter point, however, rather helped him with the proletarians of the towns. The fuss made about the habits of the pheasant, and its positive dislike of mangold wurzels, confirmed popular suspicion concerning the pampered nature of these birds, and diverted attention from the real lack of meat and marrow in the speech.

A little later* Mr. George pursued the theme :—

> 'You have no notion in the towns of the pagan thraldom that stifles liberty in our villages. The squire is god; the parson, the agent, the gamekeepers—these are his priests; the pheasants, the hares—these are the sacred birds and beasts of the tabernacle.. The Game Laws are the Ark of the Covenant, and the business of the labourer is to fill with the fat of the land the flesh-pots of the temple, whilst he bows down and worships its graven images. Ah ! you must not have too much independence in that atmosphere; there must be no State credit to build houses; the houses must be landlords' houses.'

* At Holloway.

State credit for rural housing carried things a little further. But the land policy as a whole remained cloudy, and the land campaign, after the battle of the Budget, was but decanted champagne.

When the Land Committee, appointed by Mr. George as the Tariff Commission had been by Mr. Chamberlain, presented a two volume report intended to be a new evangel, the reception was irreverent. Mr. George was not a little disappointed. But he could hardly expect, in the state of public agitation concerning Ireland, that people should get vastly excited over something which, if bad, was no worse than the year before. Moreover, Mr. George miscalculated the extent of English animosity against the landed classes; Welshman by birth and townsman by habit, he had not grasped the rough and grumbling geniality of rural England. So he continued to make himself believe somehow that the people were longing to get at the oppressor, and were impatient with the gathering Ulster trouble as a mere irrelevancy.

Mr. George's real feelings concerning Ireland can hardly be gathered from his meagre references to the subject. That he had a certain sympathy with Ulster is certain. He might reprove, but he could understand, the Presbyterian ministers who were talking about a second William the Deliverer, and with his little reverence for constitutional nicety he might easily be less scandalised than many over the preparations for armed resistance. Whatever the case, he dealt little in public censure of Ulster, while in private his voice was thrown on the side of inaction. At one period all but three members of the Cabinet, it is believed, were in favour of decisive action against Sir Edward Carson. Mr. George was one of the dissentients, and the step was delayed. Afterwards Mr. Redmond intervened, holding that Irishmen should settle their disputes among themselves; the position of the minority was accordingly strengthened; and matters were allowed to drift.

Part of Mr. George's want of interest was probably due to the conviction, based upon knowledge of Mr. Redmond's placable and generous nature, that sooner or later a compromise would be effected. But to him, itching to get on with a sensational novelty, the Irish question was a wearisome interlude and Sir Edward Carson a tiresome performer overdoing his turn. It was, indeed, a very vital interest that he should get well started on a big enterprise, for, from the Marconi debate to the outbreak of the Great War, Mr. Lloyd George occupied a position not only of comparative obscurity but of great discomfort. He could not but feel that every month during which the Ulster leader occupied the limelight was exhausting the capacity of the British people to be thrilled by milder excitement. He could not but feel that, if in one sense still the most powerful Minister in the Cabinet, he was in another rather the prisoner than the colleague of Mr. Asquith. To put a proud man under a vital obligation is a great imprudence. Mr. Asquith, in standing staunchly by Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Rufus Isaacs throughout the Marconi affair, had been unfortunate enough to wound a very sensitive pride. Sir Rufus, with the placable temper of his race, no doubt thought no more about the matter, so soon as he had reached the dignified security of the King's Bench. Mr. George, embarrassed and hampered, must have resented equally the sense of obligation and the equally inevitable sense of lessened freedom and importance. The momentary relapse to his pre-Agadir mode of thought may have been due, as much as anything, to the wish to assert an independence which he was in fact far from feeling. Thus, perhaps, it was that he showed so little prevision, and was so deeply absorbed in his Domesday Book when something very like the crack of Doom was approaching.

CHAPTER XII

FOR whatever reason, the opening of the year of the Great War found Mr. George nearer the Radical left wing than at any time since 1910. It was only there that he could hope for passionate support of his land scheme. It was only there that he had found full sympathy during the Marconi trouble. A sense of personal resentment against the Unionists who had been his chief enemies in that transaction had obliterated the pleasanter memories of the Constitutional Conference, and more than restored the temper of the Budget days. He had become estranged from Mr. Churchill, whose interests, since taking the Admiralty, had become exclusively aquatic, and there was no other member of the Cabinet to take Mr. Churchill's place. With only one set in the House of Commons could he be unquestioned hero, and to that section he began increasingly to address himself.

In introducing the Budget of 1913 he remarked on the 'very startling' figure of the total, £195,000,000, and went on to attribute a great part of it to 'panics and nightmares.' Fifty years previously, he said, the country had suffered from similar delusions; Napoleon III. was then the bugbear; there was fear of invasion; enormous sums were spent on useless fortifications; there were the same calculations and comparisons between fleets, the same stories of secret preparations; and now we knew that the French Emperor not only had no hostile designs, but was exceedingly anxious to be friendly.

In thus belittling the German menace, Mr. George, it must be presumed, was ignorant of some things of which a Minister in his high position should have been informed. Lord Haldane had visited Berlin early in 1912, as the result of a suggestion thrown out by the Kaiser, had spoken with 'very big men,' and had come away, as he afterwards acknowledged,* 'feeling uneasy.' He had been forced to realise that, far from Germany being willing to call a halt in her Navy preparations, she was, in fact, providing not only for a great advance in building but for an increase in personnel and striking force; the German fleet was henceforth to be on almost completely a permanent war footing. The civilian Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, might be honestly pacific; the Kaiser might still be loath for war; but quite obviously the militarists, both on sea and land, were planning war, and would get it if possible. The only question was whether they would win.

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* To a representative of the *Chicago Daily News* in 1915.

Lord Haldane still inclined to believe in the victory of the peace party. For that reason, and in fear that the public communication of his 'uneasiness' would precipitate the very catastrophe he wished to avoid, he kept silence, not only to the public, but to his colleagues, apart from those who must necessarily be informed. A certain advantage could not be denied to this course. But it had the disadvantage that the Radical left wing could not be effectively controlled when they vilified Big Navy Ministers, insulted possible Allies, and denounced the necessary naval expenditure. It was, therefore, doubly unfortunate that the Minister who of all others had influence with this wing was not, apparently, taken into the confidence of the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary.

The Government's policy, after the unavailing offer by Mr. Churchill of a 'naval holiday,' was to go on with the necessary building. But in the meantime it spoke fair, and strove to prove, by its attitude during the later stages of the Balkan War, that Great Britain was very far from hostile to the Central Empires. The Austrian view at the peace-making was definitely favoured; and the Serbs were denied their 'window on the sea' in order that a sham Albanian State should be erected under a German princeling. Meanwhile Minister after Minister pronounced war 'unthinkable'—even at the very time when Italy was being unsuccessfully entreated to join in an attack on her neighbours. Mr. Harcourt could 'conceive no circumstances in which Continental operations would not be a crime.' Mr. Acland said we 'must be known as the friends of all.' Lord Loreburn wrote that 'time would show that the Germans had no aggressive intentions,' and that 'then foolish people will cease to talk of a war between us which will never take place.' At the beginning of December, 1913, Lord Haldane, surely carrying concealment of his 'uneasiness' too far, announced that 'our relations with Germany were twice as good as they were two years ago.' Still, the Government was adamant on the main point. When the National Liberal Federation* declared 'great anxiety' over the growth in armaments, Mr. Asquith gave scant encouragement. It was one thing to offer soft words. It was another to scrap Dreadnoughts.

But Mr. George, apparently in the dark as to the facts, and not helped on this occasion by his usually keen perception, threw the whole weight of his influence into the other camp. In the Cabinet Mr. Churchill found in his old associate his chief opponent. To the country Mr. George appealed, through an interview in the *Daily Chronicle* on New Year's Day, 1914, against the 'organised insanity' of armaments. Our relations with Germany, he argued, were 'infinitely' more friendly than they had been for years, and even if Germany had had the idea of challenging our sea supremacy the 'exigencies of the military situation' (*i.e.* the greater man-power of France and Russia) must necessarily put it out of her head. Therefore it was quite enough to maintain our existing naval superiority without trying feverishly to increase it. 'Unless,' he concluded, 'Liberalism seized the opportunity it would be false to its noblest traditions, and those who had the conscience of Liberalism in their charge would be written down for all time as having grossly betrayed their trust.'

This, of course, was scarcely more mischievous, and vastly less silly, than Sir John Simon's declaration that 'the fellow-countrymen of Shakespeare and Milton could not look askance on the fellow-countrymen of Goethe and Schiller' and that 'those who had the tradition of Wyckliffe and Wesley had no ground of quarrel with the descendants of Luther.' But Sir John Simon was then (roughly speaking) nobody in particular. Mr. George, for all his temporary eclipse, was a man of first-rate position, as well as first-rate ability, and moreover (as the event proved) a robust patriot. It is inconceivable that, duly informed, he could have spoken in this vein at this time, and that he was not informed must be imputed as a considerable indiscretion. According to a credible witness,* Mr. Lloyd George was not without an inward monitor in this matter. As early as 1908, during a holiday in Germany, he had spoken of the possibility of a war between Great Britain and Germany, and, in introducing the parallels of Rome and Carthage, had developed 'views of the future which in other days would have passed as prophetic.' 'There is,' he had said, 'the same commercial rivalry, the same maritime jealousy, the same eternal quarrel between the soldier and the merchant, the warrior and the shopkeeper, the civilisation which has come and that which is still striving to come. . . . I wonder if we are not as ill prepared as was Carthage. I wonder if we are not equally distracted by factions.'

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* At Leeds, November, 1913.

There was nothing very original in these reflections; much the same thoughts had passed through some hundreds of thousands of cultivated brains during the early years of the century. But they do suggest an openness of mind most distinct from the dogmatism of the ordinary Pacificism of those days. In an active politician, however, such promptings of insight are apt to be forgotten in the midst of the allurements of opportunity, and in no case can they exercise the same salutary effect as knowledge of the brutal facts.

Such knowledge should have been Mr. George's in the early days of 1914. Things being as they were, it is not surprising that he was little more alive to the actual dangers of the national situation than were the leaders of the Unionist party, whose thoughts were exclusively occupied by Irish affairs. Even the warning crime of Sarajevo produced no abatement in the fury of faction which had been stirred by the Larne gun-running and the Curragh incident. On July 21 a conference of political leaders, including Mr. George, met at Buckingham Palace in a desperate eleventh-hour attempt to reach a settlement on Ireland. On the 24th it broke up without agreement of any kind, and if proof were wanting of the obtuse imbecility in high places it would be found in the fact that the news caused much more immediate sensation than that of the despatch by Austria, on July 23, of an ultimatum to Serbia which could only be read as a determination to end the independent existence of that nation. Five days later Austria declared war, and it became almost certain that Russia would fight Austria rather than allow the small Slav nation to be crushed.

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* Mr. Harold Spender.

During that terrible last week of July Mr. Lloyd George remained convinced that no reason had arisen to justify war by Great Britain. Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Asquith had both come to the conclusion, by Thursday, July 30, that the only possible means of staying Germany's hands against Russia, and therefore of preventing the embroilment of France, was to inform the German Ambassador that Great Britain would certainly act up to the spirit of her understanding. Sir Edward Grey had in fact given the Ambassador the clearest warning which could in the circumstances be conveyed. But when the time came for a positive decision between war and delay (or neutrality) these Ministers were unable to carry with them a majority of the Cabinet. Lord Haldane, Lord Crewe, Mr. Churchill, and Mr. McKenna were certainly in the war camp, which is said also to have included Mr. Runciman.* Mr. George, as he has himself stated, was on the side certainly of delay, and perhaps of neutrality.

> 'The Saturday after the war had actually been declared on the Continent (*i.e.* August 1),' said Mr. Lloyd George in a subsequent interview,† 'a poll of the electors of Great Britain would have shown 95 per cent. against embroiling this country in hostilities. Powerful city financiers, whom it was my duty to interview this Saturday, ended the conference with an earnest hope that Great Britain would keep out of it.'

This was, of course, the exact fact. Certain Socialist critics afterwards adopted the astonishing view that the war was a 'capitalistic undertaking.' In fact every large interest was as hostile to the war as it had been to Mr. Lloyd George's Budget. Mr. Lloyd George on this occasion took the capitalist point of view. Even as late as August 3, when certain Liberal newspapers printed a communication from the German Embassy stating that in the event of British neutrality Germany would undertake no naval operations against the French coast, he was for non-intervention. To quote further the interview to which allusion has been made, he said:

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* 'Mr. Lloyd George and the War,' Walter Roch.

† Published in *Pearson's Magazine*, Sept. 1915.

> 'After the guarantee given that the German fleet would not attack the coast of France or annex any French territory I would not have been a party to a declaration of war, had Belgium not been invaded; and I think I can say the same for most, if not all, my colleagues.'

The 'guarantee' was, of course, no guarantee at all; the value of all German guarantees of the kind was to be signally illustrated during the next few years. Mr. George's consistency can only be maintained at some expense to his perception. But in truth there is no need to scrutinise too jealously the motives which converted him suddenly from the advocate of peace to the most determined War Minister in the Cabinet. They could be explained in two sentences. At this time he was in such matters something of a child, and it needed the ritual baseness of the invasion of Belgium to open his eyes to the true inwardness of the German enterprise. He was also a democrat who had so far understood the people only in one of its moods; forty-eight hours' contact with the streets of London were to show him another, and to convince him that 'powerful city financiers' do not adequately represent the British race when 'honour's at the stake.' This is not to say, crudely, that he was against war until he thought war was popular. Such a way of stating the case would be entirely unjust. But it would be neither unjust nor untrue to say that Mr. Lloyd George has that type of character which, for good or ill, catches enthusiasms as men catch fevers. He becomes infected by the mood of the people at the very moment when he thinks he is imbuing the people with his own.

Again, it was one of his peculiarities that he could without effort pass from one extreme of conviction to the other, without losing energy or individuality. His case compares strangely with that of other members of the Cabinet who were reluctantly swept with him at the last moment into a course which they had long opposed. While Lord Morley and Mr. John Burns resigned, Mr. Harcourt and Sir John Simon remained. But, unlike Mr. George, they could not get rid of their past. War was still hateful to them, and they were always hoping, first for war on a limited scale, and secondly for some solution which was not warlike. Mr. George never looked back, and when he looked forward it was to nothing less than victory, victory complete and final, victory without qualification or short-weight. He had no antipathy for Germany; even in the darkest days of the war he retained an odd admiration, even a sort of inverted sympathy, for the enemy. He might be compared with those Irish Catholics, who, after the Boyne, replied to a Protestant taunt, 'Change kings, and let us fight you over again.' Many a time he must have indulged an artist's fancy of what he could have done, if to the German material resources he could add something the Germans never had, the power he himself possessed in such supreme measure of generating spiritual energy. A united command, generals grown grey in the great school of war, an army such as the world had never seen, and himself to maintain the 'home front,' free from apprehension as to the trenches—he must often have wistfully contrasted such a vision with the actualities of his own position.

But, though quite without the passion of some men against the German ideal and the German philosophy —robbed of its incidental brutalities it was largely his own, so far as he had one—he was no less fixed in his purpose than contemporary French statesmen, sustained as they were by poignant memories and sombre fears. Living during the war, as always, mainly in the present, with not too much thought of the future and none whatever of the past, he was able to rise, at a single stride, from the status of a party manager to that of a great National statesman, the personification of the warlike resolve of an imperial people.

CHAPTER XIII

What a baby is to a flighty but sound-hearted woman the Great War was to Mr. Lloyd George. It gave him something concrete and despotic to absorb an energy which had so far exceeded both his vision and his judgment.

The main elements in his character were in no way changed; they were to reassert themselves the moment pressure relaxed, and were indeed ever ready to emerge, even in the midst of the war, when appeal was made to that spirit of opportunism, those instincts of the smart political window-dresser and counter-hand, which are so strangely allied with a temper often approaching the heroic. The war made Mr. George great because it gave him much scope for action, and very little occasion for thought. There was in those early days no subtlety about the issue; it was a great black-and-white platitude, easily grasped by one who is after all intellectually simple. The man who asked 'What shall I do to be saved?' was not told that he must embark on a campaign for the material betterment of the masses. He was merely told to sell all that he had and give to the poor. Equally direct and simple was the message at last heard by the Welsh statesman above the babble of his 'powerful City financiers,' and it is to his credit that he did not go away sorrowful, because of his political possessions and prepossessions, but rather found a certain zest in scattering such capital.

For the first time, probably, in his life he now concentrated on one thing, and it was a thing big enough, definite enough, dramatic enough to make him forget, for some months at least, not only his personal affairs, but all the pettier considerations which had so engrossed the smaller Lloyd George, the electioneer and party manager, who is mainly visible before August, 1914. In his own words, he lost interest for the time both in vested interest and in vested prejudice. A sudden growth in the whole man was the consequence. It is only occasionally that we find, in the oratory of this period, that touch of the tawdry and the trivial which seldom failed to mar, to a fastidious taste, the effect of his social reform speeches. There is less cleverness and more wisdom; there are frequent flashes of true inspiration; the old ingenuity is dignified by genuine nobility of sentiment, as well as by true elevation of phraseology. In the field of action we discern the effects of the same impulse. The dexterity of the negotiator remains; the small attorney-like finesse has for the time vanished.

A great many emergency measures were forced on the Treasury by the unparalleled situation created by the outbreak of war, and by common acknowledgment Mr. George acted with vigour and judgment. It matters little whether the various devices for preventing a collapse of credit—the moratorium and so forth—were his own, or Lord Reading's, or some permanent official's. A statesman is to be judged by his wisdom in choosing, his courage or judgment in applying, and not by his ingenuity in inventing expedients; there are a hundred men who can suggest a course for one who can make it effective. Mr. George showed at once prompt courage and a firm sense of the limits of the practicable, and the City, which had hitherto detested his name, at once accorded him its confidence. In the country the very luridness of his past contributed to the favour shown him by former adversaries; Saul among the prophets gained by the memory of his former vexings of the faithful.

Of his old colleagues three only commanded equal esteem. Mr. Asquith for the moment spoke, and seemed to act, as befitted the leader of a great nation, in the crisis of its fate. The spell of Sir Edward Grey's influence still held. Mr. Churchill, with his genius for getting near the middle of the picture, had the double credit of being ready with the Navy and of appearing in the House of Commons with 'great tears in his eyes.'

But almost immediately these respectable figures were dwarfed by a stately and enigmatic personality. Despite his services to the Army, whatever they may have been, Lord Haldane had had to pay the price of his over-advertised admiration of all German things, and the readers of the popular Press would not hear of his return to the War Office. Lord Kitchener was summoned to Whitehall, by a voice that would take no denial, and for some time Mr. George occupied a situation quite novel to him. He had a colleague with whom, in the nature of things, he was bound ultimately to come into conflict, and against this colleague no device so far familiar to Mr. George was available. Lord Kitchener was impervious to intimidation, cajolement, flattery, and even argument. Whether he took refuge in taciturnity, or in a flood of confused and confusing talk, he equally baffled. There was no appeal from him to the Prime Minister, still less to the people. For the Prime Minister at that time accepted Lord Kitchener's view on anything and everything, and the people would have made short work of any civilian who openly derided the embodied legend who held sway at the War Office.

Mr. Asquith believed in leaving military matters to military men. Probably ready to think that they knew their own business, he was at least certain that he could not teach them it. Perhaps unfortunately for the country, certainly to his own undoing, he relied implicitly, in the words of a younger Minister, on the 'red Tabs,' or, in the more elegant idiom of Sir William Robertson, he was 'always ready to give an impartial hearing to the views of the General Staff.' But it so happened that there were two soldiers in the first War Cabinet. There was Lord Kitchener, secretive and absolutist. There was Mr. Winston Churchill, loquacious and irrepressible. If rank and experience were alone to count, Mr. Churchill was no doubt at some small disadvantage. But while the Field-Marshal might invite confidence from his record, the martial tastes, hereditary instincts, and argumentative ability of Mr. Churchill, to say nothing of his supreme self-confidence, made him no contemptible influence in counsel, and there were times when Lord Kitchener himself was overborne by his energy and plausibility.

For the moment Mr. George felt some diffidence in claiming, or recognised the impossibility of obtaining, a share of the direction of operations, and devoted himself to the task, at this time perhaps more congenial as well as more useful, of rousing the country to a due sense of its duty and of the necessities of the time.

His speech at the Queen's Hall on September 19th, perhaps the noblest he made during the war, showed how far he had pledged heart and brain to the task of victory. It was just after the great miracle of the Marne had given even sceptics the sense that the immortals had spoken judgment, in their Court of First Instance, against Germany. Against that judgment, of course, there would be appeal after appeal, with ruinous piling up of costs, but it was felt vaguely but deeply that Germany had lost because God Himself had decided that she must not win. That was the only genuine meaning in the catch-phrase about time being on the side of the Allies. If Germany could not succeed at first, with all the advantages her patient and industrious iniquity had given her, could she hope to prevail by any further efforts against the high veto on her enterprise?

A people in this mood was sensitive to the kind of appeal which Mr. George was of all public men best qualified to make. The invocation of sacred names, unpleasant enough when the matter in hand was some vote-catching measure of 'social reform,' appeared not irreverent in this solemn crisis. A few years later we were a nation of seasoned and cynical warriors. But when Mr. George first spoke, the coarsening effects of war, its filth and squalor, had not been felt, and he did most authentically represent the spirit of the greater part of the nation when he said:—

> 'It is a great opportunity, an opportunity which comes only once in many centuries to the children of men. For most generations sacrifice comes in drab guise and weariness of spirit. It comes to you to-day, and it comes to-day to all of us, in the form of the glow and thrill of a great movement for liberty, that impels millions throughout Europe to the same noble end. We have been living in a sheltered valley for generations. We have been too comfortable and too indulgent—many, perhaps, too selfish—and

> the stern hand of fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the everlasting things that matter for a nation—the great peaks we had forgotten, of Honour, Duty, Patriotism, and, clad in glittering white, the towering pinnacle of Sacrifice pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven. We shall descend into the valleys again, but as long as the men and women of this generation last they will carry in their hearts the image of those mighty peaks whose foundations are not shaken, though Europe rock and sway in the convulsions of a great war.'

There were, of course, some incidental errors of taste ('ramshackle Empire,' 'road-hogs,' 'long legs in a retreat,' and the like), but this protest against the brutality, the mechanistic atheism of Hohenzollern Germany—the culture that would 'recreate man in the image of a Diesel machine, precise, accurate, powerful, with no room for the soul to operate'—was both noble and nobly phrased.

It was not the less effective because it testified against the orator himself. Neither the British Imperialists nor the British Socialists had been free from just that worship of bigness, that passion for uniformity, that quantitative conception of welfare, and idolatry of the State; and Mr. George, but for his happy knack of forgetting, might have been conscious of some ingratitude to those who had given him so many valuable hints in the art of Prussianisation. He was to relapse into tolerance and even enthusiasm for the things he now denounced, but that at the moment he sincerely felt what he said there can be no doubt. He had caught once more the mood of the crowd. All that was fat, or smug, or ignoble, or sordid in England was then shamed or frightened into silence and passivity; for some brief space of time the heroic temper, usually content to serve, took command; and the speech thus inspired still deserves to be read as a memorial of the state of mind both of the orator and of the nation.

Different, and necessarily so, was the tone in which Mr. George about the same time addressed a deputation to the Treasury concerning the need for economy in municipal expenditure :—

> 'We need all our resources, not merely of men, but of cash. We have won with the silver bullet before. We financed Europe in the greatest war we ever fought, and that is how we won. Of course, British courage and British tenacity always come in, and they always will, but let us remember that British cash told too. When the others were quite exhausted, we were getting our second wind, and our third, and our fourth.'

The contrast between these two speeches, even allowing for the difference of occasion, is notable, and suggests what was doubtless the fact, that Mr. George was hovering between two schools of thought that had already declared themselves. The one looked to victory through man-power in the field; the other held that the greater the sacrifice in the field the more would victory be retarded. In those early days Mr. George was torn between the two ideas; as months passed he drew closer to the school of 'all in,' and it was by that school that he was carried to the supreme direction of the war. But later still doubts afflicted him, and the 'silver bullet' theory reasserted its appeal. To the end probably he never could quite make up his mind with which school reason lay. Opportunist, in no evil sense, he shifted from side to side of the dividing line in obedience to the varying pressure of military and economic argument.

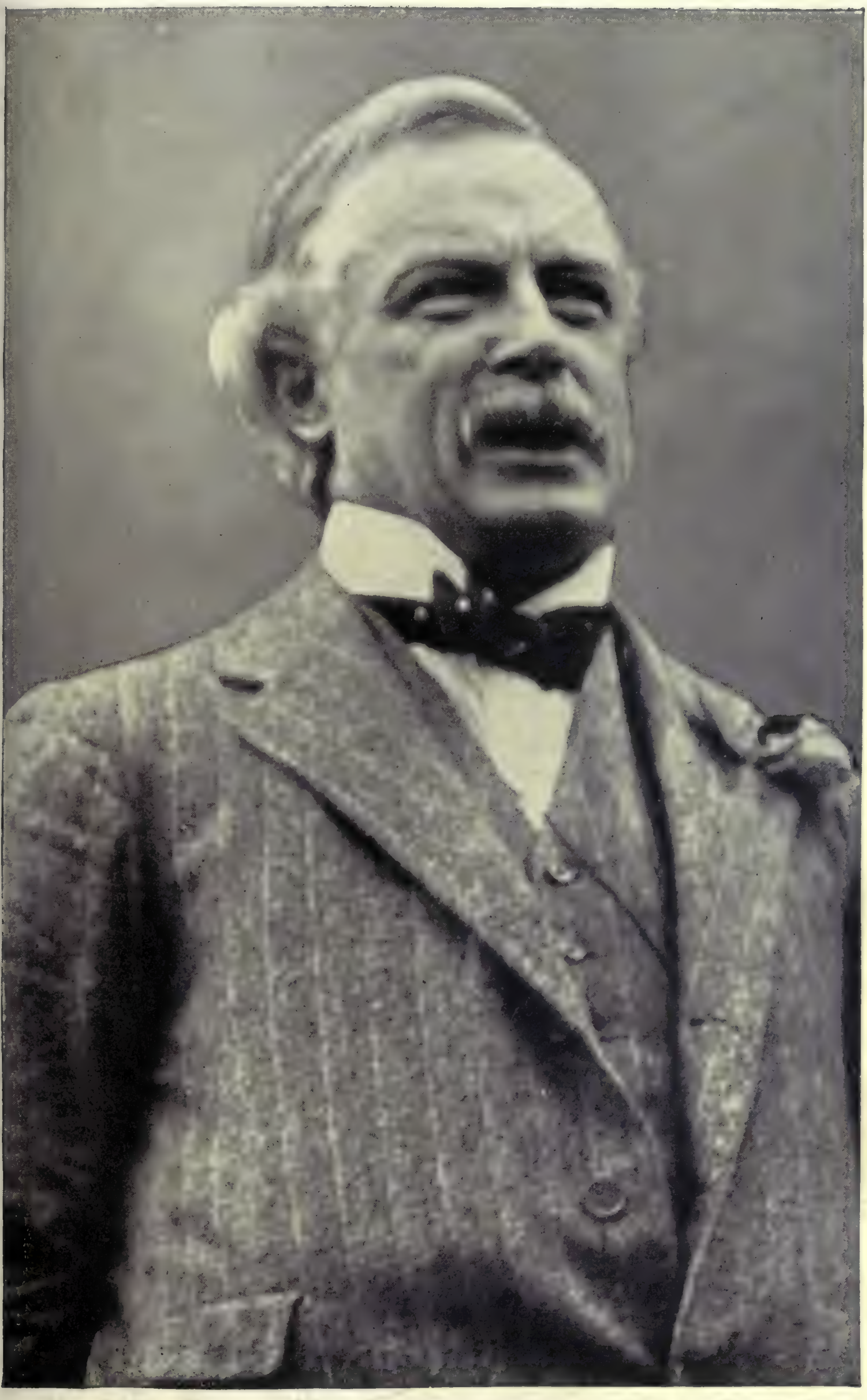
It was not until nearly the close of 1914 that Mr. George began to be attached to one military theory which was destined to have a great influence on his policy and on his relations with his colleagues. He became impressed with the idea which was commonly held even among military men in France, that there was likely to be an enduring deadlock on the Western front. In France M. Briand, for whom he conceived a strong personal liking, based, perhaps, on some considerable affinity in character and temperament, held views similar to his own, and the two became the protagonists of a policy of intervention in the Eastern theatre of war. A war of position on the Western front, a war of movement on the Russian, an attack meanwhile on Austria through Serbia, in order to draw the Germans away from Russia—this was the policy embodied in a memorandum which Mr. George submitted to his colleagues of the War Council on the first day of 1915. He suggested the landing of 600,000 troops at Salonika or on the Dalmatian coast; M. Briand was simultaneously proposing to his Government that a force of 300,000 French should be landed at one of the Adriatic ports to co-operate with the Serbs and British. Such intervention, Mr. George argued, would bring about the entry of Greece on the side of the Allies and would also tempt Rumania (a country in which, despite a Hohenzollern King, national feeling was favourable to an attack on Hungary) to abandon her neutrality. Nor was it likely that Italy would remain unmoved.

Mr. George's plan was not adopted then, and was never adopted in its entirety, but the very natural desire to 'find an easier way round' prevailed in other minds. On the very day Mr. Lloyd George's scheme was pressed a telegram was received from the Grand Duke Nicholas requesting a demonstration against the Turk. This provided a new argument for Mr. Churchill, who had already advocated an attack on Gallipoli with a view to the capture of Constantinople, and the Dardanelles commitment which ensued implied the definite shelving of the George-Briand scheme.

Mr. George, however, remained unconvinced, and when the naval attack on the Gallipoli forts failed he took the line that 'the Army should not be required or expected to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the Navy, and that if the Navy failed we should try somewhere else in the Balkans and not necessarily at the Dardanelles.' To his schemes for a Salonika expedition and for aiding Serbia Mr. George returned again and again. He wanted to 'knock-out' Austria, Germany's great reserve for man-power, meanwhile holding the Turk; the Turkish affair he regarded as essentially a side-show.

From the beginning of 1915, indeed, we have definitely to consider Mr. George as the third soldier in the Cabinet; the Field-Marshal had now to reckon not only with the ex-subaltern, but with the former Volunteer private. It is but fair to say that in some ways Mr. George better realised the nature of the war, and the relations of its parts to the whole, than his colleagues or the General Staff. His Eastern scheme may have been quite impracticable, but it did recognise the importance of Austria, which was never sufficiently understood in this country. Victory against the Turk might perhaps be, in Mr. Churchill's phrase, a 'victory such as the world had never seen,' but it would certainly have decided nothing at that stage. But in theory at any rate Mr. George's schemes were admirable. There was something big about them, and nothing of the limited-liability, tip-and-run, two-pence-coloured-adventure character which has tempted British statesmen to so many costly and tragic failures, from Walcheren to Gallipoli. Apparently the British military advisers never went to the trouble of explaining to Mr. George's satisfaction why his plans, decisive if they could be executed, were incapable of execution. It was a mistake, though perhaps a natural and pardonable one. Such a man was bound to form opinions of his own; he was bound, when he got the power, to attempt to be something more than a use-and-wont head of the Government like Mr. Asquith; and time would not have been lost in convincing him instead of merely treating his ideas as the impertinences of a politician posing as strategist.

The natural result of such peremptory condemnation of his plans was that Mr. Lloyd George conceived but a very moderate admiration for the British military Chiefs. Sir Henry Wilson was the almost solitary exception, and it may, therefore, be inferred that he was shrewd enough to humour the strategic fancies which he afterwards made the subject of public scoff. The French Generals, on the other hand, impressed Mr. George. For the most part they could talk well; they were quick to recognise that, for good or ill, Mr. George must be an important factor in the war; and



Mr. Lloyd George addressing an open-air meeting at Criccieth in the early days of the War.

when they were least convinced they were most flatteringly polite. It was good policy in the highest sense. Probably the genius of Foch would never have had full scope, even in the last awful emergency, had he begun by treating Mr. George as a mere meddler.

The general public did not know that thus early the Chancellor of the Exchequer was striving to influence the course of policy. Outwardly it seemed that his sole direct interest in the war was concerned with the supply of munitions. To this he strenuously applied himself after the rejection of his Balkan project.

It was on a Sunday afternoon in February, in his own constituency, at Bangor, that he first raised the question which was soon to become of such vital political import :—

> 'We stand more in need of equipment than we do of men. This is an engineers' war, and it will be won or lost owing to the efforts or shortcomings of engineers. Unless we are able to equip our armies our predominance in men will avail us nothing. We need men, but we need arms more than men, and delay in producing them is full of peril for this country.'

But of the real nature of the shell problem he had at this time no inkling. He knew there were labour troubles on the Clyde, and declared that it was 'intolerable that the life of Britain should be imperilled for a farthing an hour.' He believed that efficiency was being sapped by drink—'a greater enemy than Germany, Turkey, or Austria'—and seemed for the moment almost inclined to press the country to follow Russia's path of prohibition. But though he had been since October one of a Ministerial Committee to advise the War Office on the production of guns and munitions, he seems to have had very hazy ideas of the true state of affairs. In February this Committee had handed over its duties to a new body of experts, who reported that there was 'a present and continuously increasing need for shells and fuses.' On March 9, following a question by Mr. Bonar Law, Mr. George introduced a Defence of the Realm Bill giving the Government power to take over all factories capable of being used for war production. The engineering industry, he explained, was to be organised in order to obtain increased output, and was to be directed by a central committee under 'a good strong business man with some go in him who would be able to push the thing through.' Men with push, men with go, and men with push and go combined, were the fashion from this time onward, and for many months the legend grew that the country was being saved by its men of business. Later in the same month Mr. George announced that profits of controlled establishments were to be limited, and he appealed to the trade unions to play their part by suspending their restrictive regulations. In the middle of April the Push-and-Go Committee was absorbed by another of which the Chancellor of the Exchequer himself was Chairman.

But all this was of little relevance to the real drama of the shells, and some time was to elapse before Mr. George was made aware of what was passing in France. Up to the Battle of Festubert the shells affair was simply a difference between two eminent soldiers, one of whom had simply to consider his requirements in the field, while the other was compelled to take into account many other things. In France Sir John French was demanding more and more high explosive shell; in Whitehall Lord Kitchener took up an attitude the inwardness of which has been obscured rather than elucidated by the immense volume of controversy concerning it.

The truth was that he had not, and in no conceivable circumstances could have had at the time, enough of all kinds of ammunition to satisfy all the wants of the Expeditionary Force. But it was his nature to give anything but the real reason for not fully complying with every possible demand, and this systematic secretiveness would account for the alleged 'round abuse' of Sir Archibald Murray, Sir John French's emissary, and the declaration that 'the British Army ought to be able to take positions without artillery.'*

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* Col. Repington, 'The First World War.'

It is quite possible that Lord Kitchener did not grasp fully the needs of the situation. But it is inconceivable that a soldier of his high intelligence should ever have said, with complete seriousness, anything of the kind imputed to him. He might easily, however, have said it (or anything else), rather than let all sorts of people know his exact position as regards munitions. Aware how everything somehow found its way to the clubs, and thence nobody knew where, Lord Kitchener may have carried to excess his natural tendency to keep things to himself. His dilemma was indeed exceedingly awkward. To get anything like the powers afterwards exercised by Mr. Lloyd George, he must take the country into his confidence, and either by his own eloquence or that of Ministers whip it into a frame of mind appropriate to action on the heroic scale. But, apart from the small difficulty that Lord Kitchener was no stump orator, agitation meant the revelation of facts which must inevitably be of the greatest value to the enemy. Early in 1915 the position was such that a little more pressure might have been fatal to the Allies, and such pressure would doubtless have been forthcoming had Germany known the precise situation. Kitchener seems to have deliberately preferred a less rapid enlargement of resources to the advertisement of deficiency.

Whatever the case, when public uneasiness and alarm began to find strong expression he wrote the Prime Minister a letter, in the course of which he declared :—

> 'I have had a talk with French. He told me I could let you know that with the present supply of ammunition he will have as much as his troops will be able to use on the next forward movement.'

With this in his pocket, the Prime Minister, on April 20, replied at Newcastle to criticisms. While stating that 'a large and rapid increase in the output of munitions has become one of the first necessities of the State,' he said :—

> 'I saw a statement the other day that the

> operations not only of our Army, but of our Allies, were being crippled, or at any rate hampered, by our failure to provide the necessary munitions. There is not a word of truth in that statement.'

This reassuring statement had, no doubt, a certain diplomatic inspiration, since Italy was on the eve of decision as to her course of action, and it was important that she should not be prejudiced by the pessimistic outcry in the London Press. But the passage was also founded on the very definite testimony of the two soldiers who then shared between them the nation's trust.

On the day following, in the House of Commons, Mr. Lloyd George treated the same subject in much the same vein. He was quite unsensational. He did not say that the War Office could not have done more in the matter of high explosive shell, but he wanted the House to know what it had done, and he quoted figures to show that, if 20 were taken to represent output in September, the figure stood at 256 in February and 388 in March. These figures were in fact misleading, or at least did actually mislead, since the index figures were taken by Mr. Bonar Law to refer to high explosive shell, whereas they had reference only to 18 pounder shells, which were nearly all shrapnel. But the point for the present is that Mr. Lloyd George expressed no kind of alarm, and that his speech temporarily satisfied the uneasy Opposition. He, like Mr. Asquith, seemed to be convinced that an alarmist statement was unwise politically and unnecessary from every point of view.

Indeed, when Colonel Repington, prompted by Sir John French, came over to London on May 15th to 'destroy the apathy of the Government' (and, as it proved, the Government itself), he was, on seeing Mr. George, 'astonished at his ignorance of the facts.' 'He seemed,' says the Colonel, 'to know nothing that was happening.'*

This no doubt was the fact. The Prime Minister at Newcastle, the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the House of Commons, had both spoken from briefs furnished by

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* 'The First World War.'

Lord Kitchener. Later it was the habit to denounce the Newcastle speech and forget all about that in the House of Commons. It was assumed that Mr. George had shown extraordinary and praiseworthy prescience, and Mr. Asquith the most censurable blindness and inertia. Mr. Lloyd George's reputation can easily afford statement of the exact truth. Up to a point he was, like the rest of the Cabinet, under the impression that matters with regard to high explosive were, if not wholly satisfactory, at any rate not tragically bad. They were indeed 'on a footing which relieved us of all anxiety, and which enabled us, in addition to that, largely to supply our Allies.'* It was not until Sir John French moved that he took action. Then, indeed, he acted with his usual initiation and energy. He recognised in a flash the full implications of the situation. The Unionist leaders, like himself, had been taken into Sir John French's confidence, and were determined to support him. It was clear that the Liberal Government could no longer stand. The only question was whether the survival of certain Liberal Ministers could be achieved by the formation of a Coalition.

The change of Government was heralded by one or two curious indications. On May 12th, two days before *The Times* published Colonel Repington's despatch, embodying the evidence furnished by Sir John French, Mr. Handel Booth, a Liberal member, exceedingly friendly with Mr. George, and one of the most prominent of his champions on the Marconi Committee, asked the Prime Minister whether he had considered the propriety of 'admitting into the ranks of Ministers leading members of the various political parties.' Mr. Asquith replied quite definitely that 'the step suggested was not in contemplation.'

On May 17th, speaking on the motion for adjournment over the Whitsuntide recess, Sir Henry Dalziel,† also a Liberal and an old associate of Mr. Lloyd George, remarked that he was 'coming reluctantly but certainly to the conclusion that in this great national crisis it ought not to be entirely on the leaders of one political party that the responsibility should rest,' and he also advocated formation of 'a business committee to deal with business matters at the War Office.' Mr. Booth, following Sir Henry, remarked 'I have not often taken upon myself the rôle of a prophet, but I venture to say that the position will compel the formation of a Government which represents the House more fully than the present one.'

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* Speech of April 21.

† Afterwards Lord Dalziel.

If these predictions were based on mere inference they suggest an almost miraculous insight. It is more probable that both members were in possession of the best stable information. At any rate it is certain that Mr. George was in advance of Mr. Asquith in perceiving the necessity of broadening at once the basis of the Government. The publication of Colonel Repington's despatch was not needed to convert him. It merely warned him that no time was to be lost. He immediately sought Mr. Asquith with something like an ultimatum, and the Prime Minister found it necessary to do without delay what he had only a few days before said was not even 'in contemplation.'

Mr. George's desire for the inclusion of the Unionist Ministers is easily comprehensible. He was by this time honestly convinced that there was danger in the military omnipotence of Lord Kitchener. But Lord Kitchener was still so much the public idol, and to the confidence he deserved was added so much that no man could possibly deserve, that it was dangerous to meddle with him. Lord Kitchener had only to resign, giving as his reason the interference of politicians, and a merely Party Government must fall. Still worse, no member of such a Government could hope to survive, least of all a member suspected of meddling. Now Mr. Lloyd George was determined that subservience to Lord Kitchener should no longer be the policy of the Cabinet; he must know what was being done, where, why, and how. He was equally determined to avert, if anyhow possible, the catastrophe to the Allied cause which would be involved in his own relegation to Opposition. At this time, as later, Mr. George's faith in himself was a political factor of the highest importance. He believed, like Chatham, that 'he could save the country, and that nobody else could.' But even a temporary exclusion might make the task impossible, and such exclusion was threatened from the moment public confidence should be disturbed in the Liberal Ministry, and would continue to be threatened until the spectre of an alternative Party Government was laid. The only possibility he saw was Coalition, and for Coalition he declared at the first sign of Liberal crumbling. It was unpleasant, doubtless, to part with old colleagues, to modify for ever old relations. But at all cost the calamity of a complete change of Government, involving the loss of his own indispensable services, must be averted.

Mr. Asquith, then, had to meet a converging attack. Mr. George, putting forward the facts placed at his disposal by Headquarters in France, told the Prime Minister that he would be 'unable to go on.' Almost simultaneously the Unionists demanded a debate on the conduct of the war. The double assault was decisive. Mr. Asquith at once wrote to Mr. Bonar Law that 'after long and careful consideration' he had decided that the war could only be effectively carried on 'by a Cabinet which represents all parties in the State.' By the end of the first week in June the new Government was complete. It did not, unfortunately, include the representative of one party—the Irish Nationalists, but it did include the representative of their Ulster opponents, Sir Edward Carson; and the omission and the inclusion combined were destined to produce the most calamitous results. But Mr. George's immediate objects were gained. His own continuance in power was assured, and on the authority of Lord Kitchener a great inroad was now possible. A Government was established which in no conceivable circumstances could disappear as a whole, however its personnel might be varied in detail. Nothing, in short, but a revolution could displace him; and henceforth he must be intimately associated with the direct conduct of the War, with a power and prestige impossible while Lord Kitchener remained supreme. The future might be safely left to take care of itself; for the present he was in the centre of things. Munitions above all were wanted to win the war. He was at the head of the new Ministry of Munitions.

CHAPTER XIV

THE country's faith in Mr. George, his faith in himself, were brilliantly justified. Seldom has the man been better fitted for the work, and it was probably one that no other man could have done.

It was not chiefly technical knowledge, organising capacity, or tidiness of mind that were required at that exact moment in the head of the Ministry of Munitions. The two supreme requisites were vision and courage—ability to see and determination to do. Mr. George's value was that he cast aside from the first all idea of playing for safety. That virtue which is 'the only security for all other virtues' characterised all his proceedings. 'What I admire chiefly here,' said Dr. Johnson on a certain occasion, 'is the total defiance of expense.' The praise is most precisely and literally applicable to Mr. George in his munitions plans. His disdain both for expense and for the critics of expense was not only magnificent; it was in this case the highest wisdom.

The very defects of the Minister were now useful. The first necessity was to be what experts would call rash and what economists would call profligate. Mr. George's empiricism and extravagance had already cost the nation much, and were to cost it very much more. But at this juncture it was happy indeed that circumstances combined to put almost unlimited power in the hands of a man at once untrammelled by tradition, naturally disrespectful of the routine mind, unappalled by cost, and so self-confident that he would never hesitate to put his personal view, or even his chance fad, against the considered opinion of whole Cabinets and Councils.

Mr. George's first step was to get some reasonably close estimate of the number of men who were to be ready for the field at various dates, in order to secure that munitionment should proceed in some correspondence with the growth of the great new Armies. To supply these the existing munition plants were, of course, totally inadequate, and it was hopeless without great extensions to expect fulfilment of the orders which had been showered by the War Office. Further, many of the War Office experts, influenced by South African experience, had not fully grasped the peculiar necessities of the static warfare on the Western front; and Mr. George, a realist in such matters, preferred to go for his facts to men with actual experience of the battlefields. Big guns, for example, appeared to be wanted in great numbers; Mr. George proposed a figure astounding to the Cabinet, derisory to the experts. Faced with general opposition, another Minister might have yielded or compromised; Mr. George, though well aware of the risks he ran, pledged the country to gigantic orders for which he might have been surcharged. This action was fully justified by the event. Before the guns were made Generals in the field were clamouring for more.

As soon as the Ministry was formed, weekly progress reports, showing the orders placed, the promised dates of delivery, and the actual delivery, were required, and it was found that out of every hundred high explosive shells promised by contractors only sixteen were being delivered. This fact could not be fairly laid to the charge of the manufacturers or their workmen; the plants then in being could not possibly execute more than a small fraction of the orders which an overworked and rather bewildered War Office had been in the habit of dumping on contractors. It was no mere question of 'speeding up,' but one of organising an immense new war industry. Great sites had to be acquired. Enormous new factories had to be built and equipped; scores of millions of pounds worth of the most modern automatic machinery had to be acquired, and the whole enterprise constituted, in the words of an American journalist,* 'the biggest engineering feat since the Panama Canal.' Not only had the Ministry to arrange for machines to make munitions; it even had to provide machines to make machines. The vastness of the plan testified to one side of Mr. George's genius; another side was revealed in the gay impetuosity with which he overbore all difficulties of detail. To tell him that a thing could not be done was only to complete his determination that it should be done.

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* Mr. Roy Martin.

The inspiring ideas of 'Get on with it' and 'Expense no object' were undoubtedly sound. War is the most expensive as well as the most terrible of human enterprises, and its expense, as well as its cruelty and filth, may well be considered by statesmen and peoples while peace is still possible. But in waging war, to be delicate concerning the effusion of blood, or horrified over the wastage of treasure, is merely imbecility. There is even a certain virtue in the ostentation of expense, that vaunting and glorying in sacrifice which Mr. George shared with another great War Minister, William Pitt. It stimulates the dullest, and shames the greediest, to be shown by the great that nothing counts but victory. It is no doubt true the Ministry of Munitions spent a great deal more money than was, on the most generous calculation, necessary. It may be that much was spent unwisely, and that the splendour of the design was not matched by a corresponding efficiency of execution. Bustle, as Mr. Asquith once acidly said, is not always business, and something may have been actually lost by the Prime Minister making 'four separate journeys in a day to Woolwich' and dining on bread and cheese after 'eating nothing since breakfast.' We may be at least fairly sure that the salvation of the nation was not materially advanced by Mr. George's lieutenant, Dr. Addison, taking 'nothing but an apple' for lunch. With all the bustle, things were 'nothing like right'* at the end of 1915, and fifty per cent. of the high explosive shells supplied to the Army were ineffective. It was not till three months later that affairs were reported as satisfactory.

But such facts do not materially affect the main truth. The foolish legend of a department of supermen, in which miracles were common form, has tended in some degree to rob the Ministry of Munitions of its very real claims to the gratitude of the nation. The Ministry's business men were some of them clever, some of them not so clever, and some thoroughly stupid and even unbusinesslike. The only miracle was their chief, and the proper praise for him—and it is the highest praise that can be bestowed—has no relation to his merits as a mere organiser. As such less gifted and courageous men might have done as well, or perhaps even better. But no other man then in affairs had his vision to grasp at once the vast contours of the transaction and his courage to attack it in the grand manner, staking his very political existence on the issue.

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* Col. Repington, 'The First World War.'

Reference has already been made to big guns. In regard to these, soon deemed as necessary as high explosives, Mr. George's prevision was of enormous service. As Mr. Montagu said later, 'Mr. Lloyd George ordered far more guns than were thought by the War Office to be necessary, and yet received new requirements showing that he had not ordered enough.' It was during a conference with various French Generals at Boulogne in the summer of 1915 that he was first impressed by the need for big guns, and he decided at once that the requirements presented by our headquarters staff were altogether inadequate. Returning straightway to Whitehall Gardens, he was warned by Lord Kitchener that what he demanded in the way of artillery could not be produced for three years, but, undismayed, he placed his demands before the heads of the armaments firms. They also were dubious. But the guns were ordered and the guns were delivered. The supply of machine guns was also enormously increased under Mr. George's administration, but something of the credit for this may fairly be awarded to Mr. Asquith, who, after a visit to the front, was careful to impress on his subordinate the vital importance of this weapon.

Throughout his connection with munitions production, Mr. George's chief anxiety was Labour. The trouble was not so much with the small minority of definitely unpatriotic men, tinged with the ideas which were later to produce the Russian collapse. More serious was the distrustful attitude of the ordinary trade unionist to schemes for 'dilution' by women and unskilled men. There were many excuses. The trade unionist saw large wages made by women and unskilled men. He saw vast profits earned despite the legal limitations. The ascetic atmosphere of 1914 had yielded to an outburst, prompted and justified by the catchword of 'business as usual,' of luxury expenditure. The trade unionist would hardly have been human had he not developed some taste for profiteering and some suspicion that war-time concessions might be used to undermine his position when the war was over.

Faced by constantly recurrent Labour troubles, Mr. George alternatively exhorted and threatened, varying fervent appeals to patriotism with threats of the employment of powers already extensive and easily enlarged. Thus, at Manchester he said: 'I am here to ask you to help us equip our gallant troops with the means of breaking through the German lines. I know you will do it.' A few months later he was remarking that, for those that lagged, it was 'very useful to have something that will jog them along.'

With his power-loving nature he would no doubt have preferred the more direct means; and indeed the mere drudgery of persuasion is such that it is not surprising that there are few autocrats equal to the ex-demagogue. For compulsion for the Army he had not yet declared, and on grounds of expediency he was perhaps still opposed to it. In introducing his last Budget in May 1915, he had expressed the wish that the Allied countries would decide how Britain best could help them. They could keep command of the seas; they could maintain a great Army on the Continental scale. They could, as in the Napoleonic wars, bear the main burden of financing the Continental Armies. 'Britain can do the first; she can do the third; but she can only do the second within limits if she is to do the first and the last.'

No doubt his views were largely determined by his Ministerial position. Wherever Mr. George has happened to be, there, in his view, has been the centre of all things. As Chancellor he would be naturally impressed by the expense of universal military service. As Minister of Munitions he wanted both men and money for guns and shells, and was inclined to postpone the claims of the army. As late as the Autumn of 1915 he seems to have told Colonel Repington,* over a cigar, 'not to hustle the Government on conscription.' But it is clear that at a very early period he was impressed with the desirability of what was afterwards called 'industrial conscription.' In the Manchester speech already quoted, while paying tribute to the 'moral value' of the voluntary principle, he reminded his audience that compulsion had been 'the greatest weapon in the hands of the democracy many a time for the winning and the preservation of freedom.'

What he chiefly wanted at this time was unlimited power over the civilian population. But 'conscription of labour' could hardly have been ordained without 'conscription of capital,' and those who would not have called the first slavery would certainly have called the second robbery. Mr. George could not be given all he wanted, but he was given a good deal. Capitalists were confronted with legal checks on profit-making; workers suddenly found that they had no free market for their labour. But while a man's work is a very visible thing, the manipulation of modern business makes most difficult the detection of profits which it is desired to conceal. In practice, therefore, the weight of the official hand chiefly descended on the workman, who remained distrustful to the end, and if on the whole the system of compulsion worked, the fact was due rather to the surly patriotism of trade-unionism than to its sense of being fairly treated.

Even the capricious and occasionally irrational despotism of the Liquor Board led to much less trouble than might have been anticipated, perhaps because Mr. George's teetotal enthusiasm† was tempered by a realistic discretion which grew with his experience. During his Premiership beer was frequently diverted, by direct order of the Government, from perfectly law-abiding districts to the zones of industrial unrest.‡

By the end of 1915 the shells and guns question, if not settled, was in a fair way of settlement, and Mr. Lloyd George could without fear throw himself into the next great controversy. To the adoption of conscription, as already suggested, he had no objection whatever in principle. Even in his Pacificist days he had toyed with ideas of a sort of citizen militia based on service for all, and had placed before the Cabinet a memorandum in favour of the adoption of the Swiss system. Whether the power of impressment should be used, or held in reserve, was to him a matter of pure expediency. To Mr. Asquith, on the other hand, there was a real principle involved in the voluntary system. In his view a main function of Government was to tell people what they ought to do, and then let them do what they liked. That, when all is said, is the Alpha and Omega of Liberalism; and everything else, if it is not Toryism, is Socialism.

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* 'The First World War.'

† He is not, however, himself an abstainer.

‡ Statement by Mr. G. H. Roberts, M.P.

On principle, then, there was a division in the Cabinet, but in times of stress principles are usually shelved, and it was largely so in this case. The true division was on the question of expediency. The Army wanted men; conscription was admittedly the surest, the most direct, and the most convenient way of getting them, if (1) it could be adopted without shock, and if (2) it could be worked with discretion. But there were three great queries. Would the country, with its profoundly unmilitary and anti-militarist temper, stand conscription? Could the country afford it, in view of naval and other commitments from which our conscriptionist Allies were more or less exempt? If conscription were stringently and rather woodenly enforced (which would assuredly be the case if the power fell into the hands of the military authorities), would the wholesale withdrawal of men from civilian work endanger many industries necessary for the war?

On the first question Sir John Simon left the Government. The second filled with concern Mr. McKenna, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer. The third caused qualms to Mr. Runciman at the Board of Trade. Mr. Asquith was on the whole with the objectors, and Lord Kitchener, who had learned to like and trust Mr. Asquith, was disposed on all grounds to support him.

He seems not to have regarded conscription as an immediate issue, and even if he had done so he would probably have hesitated, as a matter of general policy, to give his countenance to the party which was pressing it on the Prime Minister. For if Mr. Asquith were forced to resign there could be only one successor, and Lord Kitchener had no mind to exchange King Log for King Stork. While giving Mr. George every credit for being, as he put it on one occasion, 'out to win,' he had never been on cordial terms with the Minister of Munitions. There were unpleasant brushes between them at the Cabinet Councils, and Mr. George seems to have regaled the military correspondent of *The Times* (who 'wanted him for Prime Minister, and Carson for Minister of War')* with 'severe sayings' concerning his colleague. How to get Mr. George as Prime Minister was already being discussed in the clubs and drawing-rooms which had made history in Ulster just before the war.

The exact moment of Mr. George's conversion to conscription is uncertain. He had been against it when he was at the Treasury. He had been lukewarm about it during his early months at the Ministry of Munitions. The course of the war during the latter part of 1915 convinced him that it was inevitable. But he was not at once prepared to work whole-heartedly with the thorough-going advocates of compulsion. In one important respect, indeed, he differed from the soldiers who at first led the agitation. They wanted men to feed the French furnace; he was unwilling to give them men simply for that purpose. In his view, Loos was not a British victory but a British Golgotha, and he was by no means certain that the Army should be given more and more men to expend in operations defectively conducted. For some time past he had tended strongly towards pessimism, and in the preface to a collection of his speeches, published a few weeks before Loos, he had pointed out the significance of the Russian retreat. Russia had finished her contribution. Who was to take her place?

> 'France cannot be expected to sustain much heavier burdens than those which she now bears

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* Col. Repington, 'The First World War.'

> with a quiet courage that has astonished and moved the world. Italy is putting her strength into the fight. What could she do more? There is only Britain left. Is Britain prepared to fill up the great gap that will be created when Russia has retired to re-arm? Is she fully prepared to cope with all the possibilities of the next few months—in the West, without forgetting the East?'

This preface must be regarded as Mr. George's manifesto on a new situation. He had now been convinced that it was not enough to maintain the command of the sea, to finance the Allies, and render a limited military aid. He was a conscriptionist in mind, though for the moment he asked for nothing more than further efforts in the workshops. Meanwhile he hoped for a change in strategy. We had failed on the Western Front, we had failed still more tragically at the Dardanelles, but there remained his first idea of a Salonika expedition, and the beginning of a new attempt to crush Serbia helped to revive his enthusiasm for it.

Withdrawal from the Dardanelles had for some time been favoured by Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. George and Sir Edward Carson were his chief supporters; both wanted the troops so released to be used in a Balkan campaign to save Serbia. In France a strong party was also anxious for a great move in the East, partly because there were political reasons for finding a high command for General Sarrail, a good Republican, whose claims had been ignored by Joffre. Despite French backing, however, and his own most vehement pressure, Mr. George could not get his way. There was a revived hope of victory at Gallipoli; the men denied to Mr. George were used in another effort there; Serbia was left to her fate. Believing as he did that his own strategy would have saved an Ally, and perhaps have brought us two more, it was natural that these events should strengthen Mr. George's conviction that the war would never be won unless he got a dominant share in its control.

The first step to this end was evidently the removal of Lord Kitchener; and there is no doubt that when the Secretary for War was persuaded to examine personally the situation at Gallipoli the hope of the Lloyd George party was that he would be kept abroad for the rest of the war and that Mr. George would assume his still vast authority at the War Office. There was profound disappointment when Lord Kitchener returned after a few weeks' absence. The malcontents had only been able to effect a minor stroke; the Ordnance Department had been transferred from the War Office to the Ministry of Munitions. Otherwise Mr. Asquith, whose interest it clearly was to keep Mr. Balfour on one side of him and Lord Kitchener on the other, had contrived to preserve the *status quo*.

Those who were plotting for a Lloyd George Ministry were probably much more disappointed than Mr. George himself. In the closing months of 1915 the Premiership was something to be avoided rather than sought. That Mr. George at this time wanted power—the largest share of power he could get—is certain. It is almost equally certain that he had no fancy for supreme responsibility.

Meanwhile Lord Derby, appointed Director-General of Recruiting, had entered on his duties with the curious observation that he felt himself to be the 'receiver of a bankrupt concern.' The first upshot of his scheme was the cry of 'single men first,' and in January 1916, the Prime Minister introduced a Bill requiring all unmarried men and childless widowers to attest. Regarding this measure Mr. Lloyd George kept silence. On the other hand, he made no secret of his dislike for the next step, which would have had the effect of bringing to the colours a certain number of boys, while still leaving the married men. In face of the opposition of the Liberals in the Government, and many of the Unionists, Mr. George advocated a General Service Act. For the moment, however, the only result of his intervention was to kill the Bill for the conscription of boys. His own time was not long in coming. At the beginning of May 1916, his cautious constancy was rewarded by the introduction of a third Military Service Bill, placing married and single men on an equal footing. To this measure Mr. George accorded strong support.

'Every great democracy,' he said, 'which has had its liberties menaced has defended itself by resort to conscription, from Greece downwards.' Washington, Lincoln, the French revolutionaries had all used this weapon. It had been suggested that the working-classes would revolt, or at least murmur :—

> 'I object to all this talk of the working classes as if they were not an essential part of our community, but as if they were a sort of doubtful neutral of whom we may have to be careful. This is their country just as much as ours. They know this is a struggle for liberty. They have sacrificed more liberty than any class; they would lose more by the downfall of liberty than any class, and they know that Prussian domination would hurt them more than any other class in the country. They know more than that. They hope, as we all do, that this is the last frenzy of war before it expires. There is no class that has greater interest in peace than the working class. They know perfectly well that if the Prussians through any means—neglect on our part or failure to throw in all our resources at the right moment—triumph and become the lords of Europe, it will be but the beginning of war, for humanity would not long endure that yoke.'

A malicious critic might have made much of the point that the law had, in fact, recently made many distinctions between the working classes and the rest of the community, and that the orator himself had been responsible for some of the most striking of these discriminatory measures. But there was little disposition in any quarter to score such debating points. One Labour criticism alone was of a kind to dwell long in Mr. Lloyd George's memory. Mr. Philip Snowden acridly reminded the Government that the country had lost more men at the Dardanelles than it had obtained under the Derby Scheme. Mr. George at least was not likely to disregard that sneer. It tended to strengthen his feeling that demands for more men were only justifiable if it could be shown that they were well used.

It is of little avail to-day to trace the history of the struggle in which Mr. George had now emerged as victor. But there is one page in that history, at present blank, which will doubtless be filled in. The historian will be curious to know who originated the Derby scheme? Who enmeshed Mr. Asquith in his pledges to the 'married men?' Who thought of dividing the single and the married so that the latter would clamour against serving until all the former had been taken? The married men, automatically converted into keen conscriptionists, assiduously dug the pit into which they themselves tumbled a few months later. The Liberal members of the Government, making no demur to the inch proposed at the end of 1915, were deprived of all logical argument against the many ells subsequently demanded. Clearly the mind which contrived all this was of no ordinary subtlety, and nobody is likely to credit Lord Derby with so large a share of the serpent's wisdom. One is reminded of those old pictures which bear no name, but which any connoisseur will confidently declare to be 'signed all over.'

A few days after his speech on the Military Service Bill, Mr. George's attention was momentarily diverted from the war. The Easter rebellion in Dublin had impressed on the Prime Minister the advisability of attempting an immediate settlement of the Irish question, since in his view the suspension of Home Rule had been mainly instrumental in giving their chance to the irreconcilable enemies of Great Britain. Mr. George was now asked to confer with the representatives of the Nationalist Party, and for a week or two he was engaged in discussions with Mr. John Redmond and others. The episode is more conveniently treated in connection with the general story of Ireland during and after the War, and is only mentioned here because destiny had decided that Mr. George's connection with the Ministry of Munitions, thus interrupted apparently but for the moment, should never be renewed.

CHAPTER XV

On Tuesday, June 6th, 1916, the nation learned with amazed grief that Lord Kitchener had been drowned while on his way to Russia. 'Never,' writes his biographer,[*] 'since man has made the lightning his messenger, did the passing of an individual so profoundly move humanity as a whole.' This is hardly an exaggeration. The whole world, Christian, Moslem, and heathen, British and non-British, made some gesture of reverence, and it is to be said to the credit of the chief enemy that on the whole even Germany was not dead to the promptings of chivalry.

But even the death of Lord Kitchener could not in such times involve more than a momentary pause, and it so happened that on the Wednesday evening Mr. Asquith was quietly entertaining one or two political guests at his official residence. During the evening he was called out to see Lord Reading, the Sir Rufus Isaacs of other days,[†] and found to his astonishment that the Lord Chief Justice's errand was to urge that Mr. George should be appointed without delay to the vacant War Office. It would be no less absurd than uncharitable to attribute to Mr. George any act or part in this precipitate move of his intimate friend. He himself is by no means given to diplomatic methods of such extreme simplicity, and he would be the last to encourage their employment on his behalf. Whatever his eagerness, instinct would tell him what proved to be the fact—that too much haste in this case meant less speed. Mr. Asquith, genuinely fond of Lord Kitchener, felt deeply the tragedy of his death; and his well-developed sense of the fitness of things was offended by any suggestion of speculation as to the future of the dead man's shoes while search for the dead man's body was still in progress. He therefore took rather more time than he might otherwise have done in making up his mind regarding the War Office. For this delay there was another reason. The Prime Minister's closest supporters were not anxious to see Mr. Lloyd George in charge of the Army; they would have preferred Lord Derby, as a safe and sound, if not brilliant Minister. But it was not in Mr. Asquith's character to resist for long a steady and strong pressure, and in the present case the pressure was powerful and unrelenting.

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[*] Sir George Arthur, 'Life of Lord Kitchener.'

[†] Then nominally Lord Chief Justice, but employed in many war activities.

The truth was that Mr. George was by this time restless and unhappy at the Ministry of Munitions. So long as the problem was simply one of thinking big things and getting them started with 'push and go' he could throw his heart into the work. But once the system was established the office tended to become one of rather wearisome routine and detail, and there was not enough to absorb the chief's abounding energy or to satisfy his restless imagination. The Irish interlude, also, did not engage his interest; it seemed rather like side-tracking him. So, when the tragedy of the *Hampshire* opened the doors of a new theatre of activity, the most important, next to the Premiership, he was determined not to lose the chance, and Mr. Asquith's objections, however fundamental they may have been, were worn down.

To the public the appointment was not only popular; it seemed inevitable. Mr. George had won the shells for the Army; he had won the men for the Army. He enjoyed the backing of the most powerful section of the Press, which constantly contrasted his abilities and successes with the follies and failures of most of his colleagues. Once Mr. Asquith was subdued, the only possible obstacle of a serious kind was objection from the Unionist Party. But there were already many Unionists who wished nothing better than a Lloyd George Ministry, and those who thought otherwise could hardly cry that the pass was sold when they saw their leader shaking hands with him who desired to capture it. The attainment of Mr. George's ambition was, in fact, chiefly due to the absence of ambition in Mr. Bonar Law.

As the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the

Chancellor of the Exchequer were all Liberals, Lord Kitchener's great office would, by all party reckoning, have devolved on a Conservative. But Mr. Bonar Law could hardly care to see one of his lieutenants in higher and more active employment than himself, while his modest conviction of a consummate talent for playing second fiddle made him disinclined to put forward claims on his own behalf. This mixture of sensitiveness and humility was the basis of much. Mr. George had found a fellow Minister of qualities admirably supplementing, while in no sense overshadowing his own, a man of no glamour, but of much useful clearness of head in small matters, one whom he could trust, one not easily jealous (except of his own subordinates), one who could take off his (Mr. George's) shoulders precisely those labours and responsibilities for which he had least fancy. Mr. George had already seen himself in the part of Pitt. He now found ready made exactly the kind of Newcastle Pitt would have selected if he could have had his choice. Such a partnership was a convenience the greater because already there was no telling when the great moment would arrive. For from the time Mr. Lloyd George entered the War Office close observers recognised that the Prime Minister was doomed. It was merely a question when the convenient time should come for letting the sword fall.

The War Office, however, was not quite the place which Lord Kitchener had accepted in 1914. It was not so much that the Ministry of Munitions had made inroads on its power; all could be arranged with a complaisant Minister in charge of the vacated post. More serious was the fact that a good deal of the purely military authority normally in the hands of the Secretary had been delegated to Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial Staff. The latter had the right to issue orders to the Army in his own name; it was also his privilege to hold direct communication with the War Council of the Cabinet.

Now nobody could describe Sir William as complaisant. As much a self-made man as Mr. George, he knew exactly his own mind, and he habitually expressed that mind with the most tersely idiomatic directness.

Moreover, Sir William was known to hold the strongest opinions that the war would be lost or won on the Western front, and that the ideas of Eastern strategy favoured by Mr. Lloyd George were founded on a dangerous delusion. The two men were almost equally stubborn, though in different ways. Mr. Lloyd George, infinitely various in means, always ready to sacrifice a little fish if it would land a big one, kept his main end always in view; Sir William simply relied on the immovability which won him in France the nickname of 'Le Général Non-Non.' Sir William admired Mr. Lloyd George as a politician who had taken a strong line on compulsion, though he was determined to yield no jot or tittle of authority; on his side the civilian unjustly underappraised the qualities, sound, if not brilliant, of the military chief. At one time he had held the idea of getting Sir William deprived of his exceptional powers and so reducing him to practical impotence. But this would have involved the awkward issue of 'hands off the Army'; a break with the military party (which was a great part of Mr. Lloyd George's strength), and the defiance of Lord Northcliffe, who had decided that the soldiers must be left alone. Making the most of what he must have considered a bad job, Mr. George decided to step into Lord Kitchener's shoes without demanding that they should first be stretched.

Probably he hoped to repeat at the War Office the 'push and go' methods of the Ministry of Munitions. But what is easy in a new Department is difficult in the presence of hoary tradition. The new Minister could not, by making Sir Eric Geddes a General, get him appointed to a genuinely military command; for this superman room could be found as Director General of Railways, but not as Quartermaster General. Even less could Mr. George impress on the soldiers strategic ideas evolved from his inner consciousness, or suggested by those fertile and pliant subordinates who were so apt to capture his sympathy. Sir William Robertson would listen stolidly, but also with some impatience, to a long series of suggestions, and then veto them, each and all, rather like a tired nurse dismissing an ingenious child's complicated pleas to stay up. Nothing would induce him to justify his objection by long technical explanations. He took the soldier's ordinary view that it was enough, in such matters, to say that a thing was impossible, or impolitic, without being expected to give the why and the wherefore.

A few days before Mr. George actually took over the War Office, the Somme offensive had started—the first attack made on the great scale by the new British Armies. By the time the movements came to an end in the late autumn, they had cost some 420,000 casualties to the British, 250,000 to the French, and 720,000 to the enemy. Ludendorff has since admitted that our massed attacks always succeeded, and that the German moral suffered as the result of this protracted and appallingly bloody battle. But to civilian observers in Great Britain gains seemed to bear little proportion to their terrible cost.

Mr. George, as a civilian, naturally thought the civilian's thoughts: he spoke freely, as was his wont, to unofficial authorities of his doubts that the war could be won on such lines; and once more, looking at the map of Europe, he indulged the hope of some shorter and less bloody way to victory.

Months before, when Serbia was threatened with the tragedy which was soon to overwhelm her, he had made a memorable speech on the text 'too late'—

> 'Too late in moving here! Too late in arriving there! Too late in coming to this decision! Too late in starting that enterprise! Too late in preparing! In this war the footsteps of the Allied forces have been dogged by the mocking spectre of "Too Late"; and unless we quicken our movements damnation will fall on the sacred cause for which so much gallant blood has flowed.'

Now, under the disappointment of the Somme, he began to wonder whether it was indeed too late to resume the policy which had always attracted him.

Rumania was showing during the summer of 1916 a disposition to enter the war against Hungary and Bulgaria, and in August she actually took the field. Mr. George began to revive his old Salonika project, and when Rumania's unfortunately conceived campaign fell on disaster he was found urging with all the eloquence at his command that help should be sent.

In September he and Mr. Montagu, the new Minister of Munitions, met the French Ministers for War and Munitions in Paris, and it was announced that 'satisfactory conclusions' were reached regarding measures discussed for 'the most effective employment of the joint military resources of France and Britain.' Sir William Robertson was greatly disturbed by this discussion in the absence of any representative of either Staff, and his uneasiness was communicated to a section of the British Press. It was clear to these critics that the Secretary for War was meditating 'interference with the soldiers'—a thing which might well be tolerated when Lord Kitchener was alive, but was to be deprecated now he was no more.

To Mr. George this complaint of 'interference' would seem no less insincere than stupid. His theory appears to have been that it was for him to lay down the general lines of strategy. But that would not strike him as 'interference' any more than twisting a man's thumbs struck a Japanese police official as 'torture.' Interference was meddling with the dull but important details, tonnage, transport, supply, reinforcements; and with these he had not the smallest wish to concern himself. War—such seems to have been his view—could be carried on much the same as politics. He had decreed, for example, that there should be an Insurance Act, and had supplied the motive force to carry it. The details he had left to experts. Did not military experts exist for similar purposes? Had not the greatest War Ministers used them in that way?

It is easy to condemn such an attitude, easier still to ridicule it. But, just as one kind of soldier will, like Marlborough, inevitably interest himself in politics, so will one kind of statesman, like William Pitt, inevitably interest himself in military operations. It is not quite enough to consider the matter settled by saying that the weight of military opinion in this country was wholly hostile to Mr. George's schemes. The quality of British military opinion must also be considered; and, speaking apart from any particular project, it can hardly be denied that the idea of a unity of front—the idea which had to be adopted by sheer force of circumstances, at the last—was utterly alien to the British military mind. Rumania was Russia's affair; Montenegro perhaps Italy's, certainly not ours; Serbia Heaven knew whose. The average British officer was keenly alive to the credit of his company, regiment, division, corps or army, or, if he were a person of really enlarged understanding, of the British Army as a whole. Very rarely did his sympathies embrace the whole of the Allies, or his imagination extend to the map of Europe.

On the other side Mr. Lloyd George, however mistaken he might be in detail, did from the earliest think of the war as one war, of the effort of all the Allies as one effort, of the disaster of one Ally as the disaster of all. He saw also quite clearly what the most distinguished soldier who is not also a statesman never sees, that plans to which grave military objections can be taken may have compensating political advantages of the most vitally important character. Unfortunately for Mr. George's point of view, however, politically inspired campaigns had so far been uniformly unfortunate from every point of view, and had actually compromised the very political ends for which they had been undertaken against military advice. If, therefore, the Secretary's standpoint may be understood, it is even easier to comprehend the attitude of the Chief of Staff.

When Bulgaria declared war on Rumania, Mr. George lost no time in impressing on the Cabinet that something must be done immediately, and he did not fail to mention that neglect of his advice a year before had led to the crushing of Serbia. Left alone Serbia's fate must inevitably be Rumania's—

> 'I therefore once more urge that the General Staff should carefully consider what action we could, in conjunction with France and Italy,

> take immediately to relieve the pressure on Rumania if a formidable attack developed against her. There may be nothing in my fears, but no harm would be done by being prepared for all contingencies.'

Nothing was done, or at least nothing effective. After extraordinary delays an extra division and a half, or thereabouts, was sent to Salonika, but, though Monastir was taken in November, the mischief in Rumania had already been accomplished. Mr. George agitated in vain, for Sir William Robertson threatened resignation if his views were over-ridden, and the Prime Minister, as usual, supported the military opinion, on the side of which the influential Press was also ranged.

Mr. George's feelings were deeply wounded. Any sense of personal grievance was embittered by the conviction that our French Ally was equally puzzled and troubled by the way things were going in England. Mr. George had pressed the Salonika scheme on the French; now, when M. Briand was heart and soul for it, he was denied adequate British support. Doubtless there were many moments when Mr. George saw the whole stability of the Alliance threatened because his advice was disregarded by colleagues who accepted as decisive the blunt negations of one whom he was inclined to picture as a glorified sergeant-major. It may not be that Mr. George believed himself, as one of his colleagues declared, the inspired instrument of the Divine will,* and that he was, therefore, bent on ousting a soldier who could hardly be envisaged by the most glowing imagination as holding a commission from Heaven. But it is certain that he felt that the war would be lost without him.

An exceedingly able man who has that justification for any means he may take to his ends makes a terrible opponent, and others besides Sir William Robertson should henceforward have taken heed for themselves. Mr. George now saw that he could not hope directly to subdue Sir William Robertson. As Secretary for War he was in fact the subordinate of one who, in his view, should be his subordinate. More than once in the past had Mr. George been signally defeated, but defeat had always implied only an effort for something bigger. Just as he launched into the wider field of British politics because he could not break Mr. D. A. Thomas in Wales, so now he was impelled towards vaster horizons because he could not break Sir William Robertson in Whitehall. His power as Secretary of State was inadequate, in the peculiar circumstances, to quell one with whom flattery, eloquence, cajolery, threats, promises, or conjurations were equally futile. It was, therefore, necessary that he should have more power. He must be in a position to dictate, either as Prime Minister or as the master of the Prime Minister.

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* 'The First World War,' by Colonel Repington.

All that was to follow—and the chain of consequence is still far from complete—was determined from the moment Mr. Asquith definitely came down on the side of the soldiers; and centuries hence Great Britain and the world may still feel the effects of Mr. Asquith's embarrassed and hesitating choice. Clearly—so the position must have presented itself to Mr. George—he could not, as Secretary of State, exercise a decisive influence on war policy, and that decisive influence he must have; it were almost impiety, it were at lowest treason, to renounce it.

Without obstacles he could win the war. Sir William Robertson, the immediate obstacle, must, therefore, be removed. But behind Sir William was Mr. Asquith, who upheld him. The syllogism was sinister.

But it may be doubted whether Mr. George would have proceeded to the conclusion at this moment but for two things. The first was the war position. Despite unfortunate episodes, the outlook to a judicious observer might appear far from discouraging. Russia seemed a brighter spot; one danger, that of the ascendancy of the pro-German party, was disposed of by the dismissal, after most damaging revelations, of the Prime Minister Sturmer; the other danger, that of the frightful Soviet upheaval which destroyed Russia's military power, was not yet to be foreseen. Germany was perceived to be distinctly weaker, though her enfeeblement was naturally less apparent to the Allies than to Ludendorff and Hindenburg. In reality her Army had been 'brought to a standstill' and 'utterly worn out.'* Her economic attrition had proceeded far, her wheat and potato crops had failed. Austria was still worse off, and in all the enemy lands the populations were growing restive. Judged by the map, there might be no consolation for the Allies. Judged by factors known to the well-informed, the situation was much brighter than it appeared by that very rough test.

In fact, Germany was on the eve of launching her first open approach for a general peace. To a cool judge, assisted by much information denied to the public, it must have seemed for the first time that victory was in sight, and indeed only the mournful accident of the Russian revolution prevented the realisation of these hopes in 1917. The Premiership was, therefore, a much less calamitous inheritance than it might have seemed at the end of 1915. Mr. Lloyd George no doubt did not want the Premiership still, and would willingly have left it in Mr. Asquith's hands if he could have attained the power he wanted by other means—the milder means by which he in fact attempted to compass his object. But there was now no reason why, if he must proceed to extremities, he should not do so with a certain lightness of heart. If Mr. George, so pessimistic in public, were privately of opinion that as Prime Minister he would not have to wait long for victory, the mistake was excusable. There seemed every reason to anticipate an early and triumphant conclusion to the war.

The second determining circumstance was the affair of the palm kernels. It seems a trifle, but it is the tragedy of human affairs that trifles may be so important. The whole domestic situation was suddenly transformed by a debate in the House of Commons on a subject about as remote from the war as could well be imagined at a time when everything had some sort of connection with the dominating issue.

It so happened that in the closing months of 1916

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* **Hindenburg.**

Mr. George had hardly a close associate in the Cabinet. The Liberal Ministers were apparently devoted to Mr. Asquith, whose primacy had again and again been declared a national necessity, however much his policy might be criticised in detail. Mr. Balfour and Lord Robert Cecil were also counted as the Prime Minister's men, and other Unionists had been somewhat alienated from Mr. George by reason of his conflict with the military authorities, whom they were by tradition disposed to uphold. The only prominent member of the party in close touch with the Secretary of State for War was Sir Edward Carson, who a year before had left the Ministry in anger because his advice in favour of help to Serbia had been disregarded. Mr. Bonar Law, indeed, was still friendly with Mr. George; but his attitude to the Prime Minister was irreproachable, though at a little later date he quaintly acknowledged 'little interest' in Mr. Asquith. The latter's position had seldom seemed more fully established, despite Zeppelin vigils, raiding cruisers, submarines, food queues, and other war plagues, than in the early days of November 1916.

Then there suddenly arose that 'wind from the Fronde' which was destined, before it fell, to blow Mr. Asquith from the Treasury Bench and No. 10. A debate took place in the House of Commons on the disposal of enemy properties, rich in kernel-bearing palms, in Nigeria. The Government proposed that they should be sold in the open market, where neutrals and foreign friends might bid. A minority, composed of members who had been distinguished for their zeal for tariff reform, held that the right of bidding should be restricted to British subjects. They were ably led by Sir Edward Carson, who, in a fervid speech, 'prayed' the House 'not to send out a message to our suffering fellow-subjects—aye, to our soldiers in the trenches—that the war is being waged, not for the British Empire, but for neutrals.' This moving supplication was not granted, but in the division sixty-five Unionists accompanied the orator into the lobby against the Government.

Mr. Bonar Law, highly sensitive on the subject of his leadership, was forced to ponder his position. His name has been coupled with Newcastle's, and though it would be unjust to institute a comparison with that bundle of eccentricities, absurdities and dishonesties, there was one point in which the two men really had something in common. Mr. Law, like Newcastle, relished precisely that side of politics which to most great statesmen is either a drudgery or a bugbear. He was possessed by no passion for power and domination on the greater scale. In the war he was quite content to leave another to direct the storm. He had no desire to dictate strategy, to inspire diplomacy, to lecture an Ally or thunder at an enemy. So far as the war was concerned he was ready to serve wherever others thought him most useful. But he had much quiet enjoyment in the privileges, prestige, fuss and fiddle-faddle attaching to the command of a party. He found in managing party affairs, bestowing party patronage, and giving party judgments a pleasure analogous to that which a man will feel in running a racing stable, though he never longs for the excitement of riding a steeplechaser. It was enough that every candidate at a by-election should wear the Law colours, and that in every claim or complaint, every dispute as to qualifications, every charge of boring or pulling, meet deference should be paid to him as the head of a political Jockey Club.

Unfortunately, his position had never been quite ascertained. He had been elected as a papal choice; and had accepted election on the expressed condition that he would retain the leadership only so long as he retained the confidence of the majority of the party. That confidence was now threatened on precisely the one issue of all others to cause him alarm. Mr. Law had been chosen as of the straitest sect of the Tariff Reformers, a man without fiscal fear or reproach. But once already, by an unhappy fatality, he had disappointed the faithful; he had been forced virtually to abandon the famous food taxes. Now a second heresy hunt seemed to be starting. He heard the grumblings of the palm-kernel malcontents with much the same affright that fills a stag when his ear catches the distant music of the pack. It was the same pack that, with patient malice, had at last brought down his fleet and resourceful predecessor. 'B.M.G.'—'Balfour must Go.' Why not 'B.L.M.G.?' Mr. Law was very unhappy. There had been no disaster in the Lobby. But, as he knew by experience, that was no guarantee. The thing was serious; there was no mistaking the lean and hungry look of Cassius Carson; perhaps some envious Casca was already sharpening his knife; there might be a well-reputed Brutus in the background to give respectability to the whole affair.

Mr. Law, looking nervously round to see that he was not too near Pompey's statue, thought deeply, and the result of his meditations was decisive of much more than his own position. He made up his mind that, for the sake of a quiet life, Sir Edward Carson had better be brought back into the Government.

But there were difficulties. Placable and easy as was Mr. Asquith in general, prone as he was to interpret 'National unity' in terms of obliging his Cabinet colleagues, he drew a line; he would have nothing to say to the re-introduction of Sir Edward Carson. First, his experience of Sir Edward Carson had not particularly impressed him from the point of view of efficiency. Secondly, Sir Edward had done and said things not easy for the gentlest to forgive. Thirdly, it was understood that the only office Sir Edward cared to take was the Admiralty, and Mr. Asquith was quite resolved that Mr. Balfour should not be ousted, the more especially since a concerted Press campaign was then raging against the great Conservative.

Probably this particular little wheel would not have got enmeshed with other much larger wheels, thus far revolving ineffectively, but for the action of a very adroit unofficial personage with a marked taste and talent for such mechanical experiments. About five years before the outbreak of war the country had been invaded by a Mr. 'Max' (born William Maxwell) Aitken.* Mr. Aitken came, saw, and conquered. In 1909 he was utterly unknown in English politics and society, and very little known to the business world of London. He had, however, one considerable advantage—the friendship and distant relationship of Mr. Bonar Law. Both

* Later Lord Beaverbrook.

came from Canada. Both were sons of Scottish ministers. Both had achieved business success before turning to politics. But there was this difference. Mr. Law's success was moderate, commonplace, and obvious. Mr. Aitken's was enormous, romantic, and mysterious. Mr. Law would have made on his commercial side a rather dull and short chapter for a new 'Self Help.' Mr. Aitken was a Monte Cristo on the modern plan. There were whispers that he had done wonderful things as a boy in the West Indies; that in Canada, at an age when most young men of middle class parentage are still concerned over their tailors' bills, he had amassed a great fortune by the boldest ventures; that his present wealth was vast even when reckoned by twentieth century standards.

Money on such a scale is a passport both to Westminster and Mayfair; such money with such a friend in high places was quite irresistible. With amazing rapidity Mr. Aitken attained the immediate objects of his desire. He got elected for Ashton-under-Lyne, he received a knighthood, he acquired control of a London daily newspaper, and, allying himself with the extreme Tariff Reformers, he reached a position of unobtrusive but considerable authority in the inner councils of the Conservative Party. He remained intimate with Mr. Bonar Law. He gained the warm friendship of Sir Edward Carson. As Mr. Lloyd George drifted away from his Liberal colleagues, Sir Max Aitken paid him more and more court and was more and more favourably received. He was, in short, a born go-between, one of those by whom, according to Burke, the world is governed, since they 'influence the persons with whom they carry on the intercourse by stating their own sense to each of them as the sense of the other; and thus they reciprocally master both sides.'

Sir Max had a task of some delicacy. There was a widespread feeling in the country that the conduct of the war was hampered by vacillation and lethargy in high quarters. The Prime Minister was credited with a Spanish partiality for to-morrow as against to-day. The *Morning Post* had come to the point of advising its readers to back Mr. George 'without thought of the past or fear of the future.' The Liberal War Committee, which regarded Mr. George as its leader, could claim a great part of the vigour and ability of the Party. But the great weight of inertia was on Mr. Asquith's side, and the following of Sir Edward Carson alone was no compensation.

Clearly, unless Mr. Law could be secured, and could carry with him urban and suburban Conservatism, nothing could be done. But it happened at this very time that there was, on account of Mr. George's differences with the Chief of Staff, less accord between him and the Unionist leader than there had been before, or than there was later, while between Mr. Law and Sir Edward Carson passages of some asperity had taken place. These difficulties, however, only stimulated the zeal of Sir Max Aitken, who, detesting Mr. Asquith and all his works, was determined to act the part of King-maker. The three leaders were brought together, the Canadian financier acting as 'host and go-between.'* The four met at breakfast, luncheon, and dinner, and sometimes it might almost be said that the length of their confidences merged one meal into the other. The astute Sir Max persuaded his friends that nothing could be done until the countenance of Lord Northcliffe's newspaper group had been secured. This assured, the great adventure might go forward.

It is necessary, for the full comprehension of what followed, to seize the point of view of each of the four. All had, for different reasons, a wish to change the political position, and at certain points the wishes of each coincided with those of the rest. All, no doubt, were honestly dissatisfied with the way affairs were going, and felt that improvement could only lie along the lines of a tighter control by a smaller body than the Cabinet. But each saw the affair from his own special angle of vision.

Sir Max Aitken, probably, was actuated chiefly by a desire to see people whom he liked, and from whom he had much to expect, in the place of people whom he disliked and who could certainly have no motive for advancing his rank or making use of his abilities. Such men, further, love such transactions for their own sake; they excite and they flatter.

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* A writer in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Sir Edward Carson's position was little less simple. He wanted to get back to the Government as First Lord of the Admiralty. If in doing so he should upset the Prime Minister his satisfaction would scarcely be diminished.

Mr. Bonar Law wanted Sir Edward Carson back mainly because his own position might be threatened by Sir Edward Carson's continuance in opposition. Such a threat was not only personally disturbing; it might also be most dangerous to national unity. Mr. Law may well have thought that a split in the Unionist party was not only a personal and sectional misfortune but a national calamity to be avoided at almost any cost. But nearly to the last the attitude of Mr. Law to the Prime Minister was sharply distinguishable from that of any of his three colleagues. Much as he might be dissatisfied with the conduct of the war, much as he might desire a new machinery for dealing with it, he continued to put aside any idea of deposing Mr. Asquith. It unfortunately happened, however, that Mr. Law went to Sutton Courtney for a week-end just before the final crisis. He set out in deep gloom, his mind occupied to exclusion with weighty matters which he wished to discuss at length and in quiet with the Prime Minister. Actually he found himself in the midst of a lively party bent on 'forgetting the war.' What with golf without and round games within, Mr. Law had no opportunity of engaging the Prime Minister's attention. One kind of man might have taken lightly enough the pardonable inclination to unbend momentarily after a week of much work and anxiety. Another kind of man might have ejaculated (with the late Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman) 'Enough of this fooling,' and taken Mr. Asquith prisoner to some quiet room. Mr. Law, modest in manner, puritanical in temper, was merely shocked and silenced; and he returned to town in a mood to listen more complacently to suggestions that reform, to be effective, must be radical indeed.

There remains the special position of Mr. George.

We have seen that he was not likely to view the situation quite so gloomily as members of Parliament and the outside public almost necessarily did. But there can be little doubt that he was convinced that all the solid advantages of the Allies might be thrown away if there were a continuance of the belief that 'time was on their side,' and that nothing was wanted but an unimaginative persistence in routine. Victory must not only come, but come quickly; apart from the danger of the proverbial slip between cup and lip there was the fearful fact of a daily expenditure of from four to five millions. Mr. George had long ceased to believe that the existing administration was capable of the energy, vigilance, or foresight necessary. He desired the formation of a small War Cabinet exclusively devoted to thinking out and deciding promptly great questions concerning the conduct of the war, and also the setting up of special authorities, headed by business men of assumed capacity, in order to deal with shipping, food supply, and other matters of scarcely less vital import than movements in the field. The deficiencies of a peace-time Cabinet in war were afterwards alarmingly illustrated in the report of the Dardanelles Commission, and they had always strongly impressed Mr. George. So far, however, he had been unable to go beyond protest. Now it seemed that the time had really come for a decisive stand; the old 'would' coincided with a new 'can.' Mr. George wanted to be head of the War Cabinet, with practically dictatorial powers; he wished Mr. Asquith to remain Prime Minister, but to relinquish all war control.

Mr. Asquith, in short, while retaining his titular dignities, was to occupy the place which Mr. Bonar Law afterwards filled—the place of Assistant Prime Minister, charged with keeping the House of Commons in a good temper and looking after the non-military affairs of the Government. For Mr. George, honestly believing that it was his own mission to win the war, was equally convinced of Mr. Asquith's incapacity to do so. In truth Mr. Asquith, under the weight of a cruel private grief, was at this time much broken down; and his diminished energies were further hampered by his inability to put aside all the demands of society on a Prime Minister. Mr. George, who had happily been spared personal affliction, and who was, moreover, free from the distraction of social calls, was all vigour and high spirit.

The Prime Ministership itself, it cannot be too strongly insisted, was not wanted. Mr. George cared little for titular dignity; what he desired was power. Part of the scheme for weakening Mr. Asquith's position was the exclusion from effective control of Mr. Balfour, Lord Lansdowne, Sir Edward Grey, and Mr. McKenna, the four Ministers on whom the Prime Minister could chiefly rely for support. If this could have been effected without the disturbance that actually followed Mr. George's position would have been in many ways strengthened. There would have been no split in the Liberal Party, and the maintenance of Mr. George's authority would have been far less dependent on his personal genius and dexterity. He would also have been able to bestow reward exactly where he thought there was desert. As events fell out, when he came to form his Government, he was too much in the hands of the Unionists to be able to consider his friends in the measure which the character of their services justified. For example, he was greatly indebted during 1916 to the good offices of the Jewish Ministers, yet when he came to distribute offices there was only a minor place for Mr. Herbert Samuel and none immediately for Mr. Montagu. Mr. Samuel at once declined a post he considered unequal to his merit and experience, and became a hostile critic. In providing later for Mr. Montagu Mr. George had to offend many of his Conservative supporters, and accept dangerous experiments in India.

By the end of November the prandial enchantments of Sir Max Aitken had accomplished their purpose, and on the morning of the last Friday in November Mr. George had an interview with the Prime Minister. He presented a 'dark estimate and forecast of the situation, actual and prospective.' This pessimism Mr. Asquith did not 'altogether share,' but he agreed that things were 'critical,' that the War Committee of the Cabinet was large and cumbrous, and that it should be reconstituted. On this subject Mr. George left a memorandum, in which he proposed :—

> (1) That the War Committee should be reduced to three members, and should consist of the Secretary of State for War, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and one Minister without Portfolio. One of the three to be Chairman.
>
> (2) That the War Committee should have full powers, subject to the Prime Minister's control, to direct all questions connected with the war.
>
> (3) That the Prime Minister should have discretionary power to refer any question to the Cabinet.

Later in the day Mr. Asquith transmitted a considered reply to these suggestions. He agreed that the Secretary of State for War, First Lord, and some other Minister with little or no departmental preoccupation should form the 'compact committee,' and was 'inclined to add' the Minister of Munitions. But he laid down, quite firmly, that of this Committee the Prime Minister must be chairman. He could not be relegated to the position of 'an arbiter in the background or a referee in the Cabinet.' Further, the ultimate authority of the Cabinet as a whole must be preserved.

This was not at all the sort of letter any of the Four wanted. One phrase in particular must have been extremely objectionable. 'I purposely do not in this letter,' said Mr. Asquith, 'discuss the delicate and difficult question of personnel.' The implication is plain. Mr. Asquith had been apprised of the plan for replacing Mr. Balfour by Sir Edward Carson, a plan essential to all the larger schemes of Sir Max Aitken's friends—and had vetoed it. Unless, therefore, the Prime Minister's resolution could be broken down, the middle course Mr. George favoured was impossible. He must be supreme in title as well as in power, or nothing. With Mr. Asquith as Chairman, no drastic changes could be expected, and Mr. George would still be subject to the annoyance of delay, discussion, and military opposition. It would be the same bad devil under another name, as the French peasant says. If Mr. Asquith was not to be left virtual master of the situation, he must be deposed, and as the first step to deposing it was necessary to discredit him. For such a purpose there was a strong and willing Press, and it now began to speak.

On Saturday, December 1, articles appeared in the *Daily Express* and other journals to the effect that a new War Cabinet was to be formed with Mr. Asquith as Chairman, Mr. Lloyd George as 'acting Chairman,' and Sir Edward Carson and Mr. Balfour as its other members. This was evidently the last kite of compromise. If Mr. Asquith did not care to accept it, he must abide the consequences.

On this Saturday negotiations were not continued. The Prime Minister left London for Walmer Castle, Mr. George for Walton Heath. On the Sunday morning an article in *Reynolds's Newspaper*, controlled by Sir Henry Dalziel, so long and intimately associated with the Prime Minister, startled those members of the Government who, however desirous of giving Mr. George a free hand, or even of seeing him ultimately at the head of the Government, were disposed to believe that more harm than good would result from crisis at that moment. The article announced definitely that Mr. George was on the point of retiring, and that while his colleagues were still persuading him to reconsider his determination 'there was little or no chance of any success on their part.' This was, of course, quite true. Mr. George had made no secret of his intention to resign in default of the substantial acceptance of his plans; he had actually given farewell dinners to some of his friends (perhaps with a politic ostentation), and had even taken a flat in St. James's Court in anticipation of his early departure from 11, Downing Street. So much for the fact. The reasons for his intended severance of relations with Mr. Asquith were stated with acrid emphasis :—

> 'Mr. Lloyd George has arrived at the definite conclusion that the methods of dilatoriness, indecision, and delay which characterise the action of the present War Council are such, in

> his opinion, as to endanger the prospects of winning the war. At the moment there seems every indication of a Lloyd George-Carson combination in favour of a more vigorous prosecution of the war. Mr. Lloyd George's failure to induce the Government to move in time to prevent the tragic reverses of Rumania is no doubt the final fact that operated with the Secretary for War in coming to this decision.'

The tone of this statement may be profitably compared with that of the *Daily Express*. In the latter, where the influence of Mr. Bonar Law is to be sought, the suggestion is compromise. Sir Henry Dalziel, who may be presumed to be more concerned with Mr. George's standpoint, announces a definite break. In the interval Mr. George had received a letter from the Prime Minister re-asserting the necessity for his supremacy in the War Cabinet.

This Sabbath was a day of 'hurryings to and fro.' Mr. Asquith was urgently recalled to town by Mr. Montagu. Unionist Ministers hastily gathered at Mr. Law's house. While protesting against the manipulation of the Press, they decided to offer Mr. Asquith their resignations unless he would agree himself to resign in order to permit of a free reconstruction of the Cabinet. It would seem, however, that throughout the day the main body of Conservative opinion was by no means hostile to the Prime Minister. Lord Edmond Talbot, who as a Whip must be supposed to speak with knowledge, could say at lunch that day* that the House of Commons would support Mr. Asquith, and that if Mr. George came in by dispossessing him he 'would not last long.'

In the early part of the evening both Mr. George and Mr. Law saw the Prime Minister, and though nothing quite definite resulted agreement was reached as to the outlines of a compromise broadly on the lines suggested in the *Daily Express*. The question of personnel, however, was still left open; Mr. Asquith could not yet be got to consent to substitute Sir Edward Carson for

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* To Col. Repington, 'The First World War.'

Mr. Balfour. This evening Mr. George for the first time suggested the inclusion in the War Cabinet of a Labour Minister. After the interview Mr. Asquith went back to Mr. Montagu's to dinner, and it was from that Minister's house that he issued the official statement that 'The Prime Minister, with a view to the more effective prosecution of the war, has decided to advise his Majesty the King to consent to a reconstruction of the Cabinet.'

One who was present describes the gloom at this dinner-party as 'awful.' The Jewish guests were depressed, believing that no good could come of what they regarded as a premature crisis, and holding little hope that a crisis could now be avoided. Mr. Asquith's more intimate friends were in even lower spirits, and tears could be seen in Mrs. Asquith's eyes. She was convinced that the crash so long threatened had actually come. Mr. Asquith, on the other hand, was in the highest spirits. Wholly under-estimating the gravity of what he afterwards styled 'a well-organised, carefully engineered conspiracy,' he seemed satisfied that the worst was over and that the arrangement would go through.

Apart from the question of personnel, however, one question had been left vague, and as between Mr. Asquith and Mr. George it was the crucial point. The really important matter was not what Mr. Asquith should be called, it was not even whether he should be in or out of the War Council. It was simply what was to be his actual authority? Was he duly to play the part of Sluggard King to his pushing Mayor of the Palace, or was he still to be in a position, whatever his nominal status, to pronounce the formula 'Le roi s'avisera.' Mr. George is fond of history. He may have remembered (after an apparently satisfactory conversation) how William of Orange disappointed the Whig nobles. Given any opportunity, Mr. Asquith, backed by Sir Edward Grey or Mr. McKenna, might make nonsense of the most cunning plan to eliminate him.

All this must be considered in relation to the leading article in *The Times* which appeared the next morning.

After announcing that Mr. George had been urging the formation of a small War Council 'fully charged with the supreme direction of the war,' the writer continued :

> 'Of this Council Mr Asquith himself is not to be a member—the assumption being that the Prime Minister has sufficient cares of a more general character without devoting himself wholly, as the new Council must be devoted, if it is to be effective, to the daily task of organising victory. Certain of Mr. Asquith's colleagues are also to be excluded on the ground of temperament from a body which can only succeed if it is harmonious and decisive. On the other hand, the inclusion of Sir Edward Carson is believed to form an essential part of Mr. Lloyd George's scheme, and it is one which will be thoroughly understood. . . . He (Mr. Asquith) can hardly fail to have been profoundly influenced by the attitude of Mr. Bonar Law, who is believed to support Mr. Lloyd George.'

On the Sunday Mr. Asquith, perhaps influenced by peacemakers like Mr. Montagu, who, while largely sympathetic with Mr. George, desired chiefly to postpone a crisis, had gone far towards surrender—a fact which Mr. George was not slow to use when, two days later, he wrote, 'You have gone back on your own proposals.' On the Monday two influences operated to stiffen his attitude. The first was the mere fact of *The Times* article. On three successive days three different journalistic allies of Mr. George had spoken. On Saturday it was Sir Max Aitken; on Sunday Sir Henry Dalziel; to-day it was Lord Northcliffe. It is hardly wonderful that the Prime Minister should lose no time in writing to Mr. George in terms of vigorous protest.

'Unless,' he said, 'the impression is at once corrected that I am being relegated to the position of an irresponsible spectator of the war, I cannot possibly go on,' and once more he laid it down that the Prime Minister, if not a regular member of the War Cabinet, must retain 'supreme and effective control of war policy.'

The irritation caused by *The Times* editorial is in itself sufficient explanation of this accession of firmness. But Mr. Asquith had also by now consulted with his special followers, who, counteracting other influences, made him see that he ought not to accept a position of reduced authority.

Mr. George's reply was couched in light terms. He had not, he said, seen *The Times*, and attached no importance to 'such effusions'—Lord Northcliffe 'wanted a smash,' and that was all there was to say. He wound up by declaring that he fully accepted in letter and spirit Mr. Asquith's summary of the suggested arrangement—subject, of course, to personnel.

During the day Mr. Asquith gathered further indications from Liberal and Unionist quarters suggesting the impossibility of 'going on' with any schemes which in fact or appearance would derogate from his authority, and in the evening he wrote to Mr. George that the King had given him authority to require the resignation of all Ministers in order to form a new Government. Starting thus with a 'clean slate,' he laid down (1) that the Prime Minister must be Chairman of the War Cabinet or Council; some other Minister acting as his *locum tenens* when absent; (2) that Mr. Balfour must, and Sir Edward Carson must not, be a member of this body; (3) that the full question of personnel must be reserved for his own decision.

Mr. Lloyd George's immediate reply was to withdraw from the Government, which he charged with 'delay, hesitation, lack of foresight and vision,' the latest example being the failure to give support to Rumania. He reminded the Prime Minister that he had endeavoured repeatedly to warn the Government, both verbally and in writing, but to no avail. He was, he said, fully conscious of the importance of preserving national unity. 'But unity without action is nothing but futile carnage, and I cannot be responsible for that. Vigour and vision are the supreme need at this hour.'*

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* The course of these negotiations has perhaps been most clearly and succinctly traced in a well-documented article in the *Atlantic Monthly* of February, 1919.

CHAPTER XVI

Mr. George's resignation had, naturally, instantaneous effect. To the public he was the incarnation of war spirit and the mainspring of all war activities. He was the man who, on the outbreak of hostilities, had by bold and swift measures prevented financial chaos, stopped the outflow of gold, and made possible the resumption of the movement of foodstuffs from overseas, which had practically ceased as a consequence of the collapse of foreign exchange. He was the man who had given the Army its due shells and big guns. He was the man who had declared, at just the right moment and in just the right way, for military conscription. He was the man who had improved transport in France, and who, with a free hand, would have averted the Serbian and Rumanian disasters.

The public mind has no room for niceties and qualifications; and since Mr. George had done much under handicap it was ready to assume that, in a position of freedom, he would do very much more. Mr. Asquith was forced to recognise that his political life would not be worth a moment's purchase if it were known that he had let the one great man in the Cabinet go. What chance could he have against an unemployed national hero, entering on a whirlwind campaign for a more strenuous war policy? And meanwhile, of course, the Allied cause might be utterly ruined. The latter consideration was decisive. Mr. Asquith, however much he might be disposed to fight on other grounds, was not the man to risk national disaster, and he decided on resignation the moment he received Mr. George's *cartel*.

The King, of course, sent for Mr. Bonar Law, under whom Mr. George expressed perfect readiness to serve. Mr. Law, however, did not see his way to form an Administration which could depend on Parliamentary support. Probably he did not try very hard. Mr. George was now summoned to the Palace. For him also there were difficulties. Labour, though dubious, might be won. But, despite the alliance with Mr. Law and Sir Edward Carson, many solid Conservatives were not enthusiastic; the old Liberal Ministers were mostly indisposed to serve; and Mr. Churchill, who was ready to take office, provided it were high enough, would have been at this time an embarrassment rather than an asset, since he had by no means been forgiven by his former Conservative comrades.

But at the critical moment Mr. Law effected a remarkable stroke of business. On leaving Buckingham Palace he called on Mr. Balfour, and persuaded him not only to join a Lloyd George Government but to move from the Admiralty to the Foreign Office. The advantages of this arrangement were three-fold. All Conservative squeamishness was blown to the winds when Mr. Balfour's adhesion was announced. The Admiralty was left free for Sir Edward Carson. A statesman worthy to follow Sir Edward Grey—indeed, one who had been Sir Edward's mentor and oracle—had been found for the Foreign Office.

The way was now clear. On December 7th Mr. George met the Labour Party, and so skilfully handled his audience that a majority, satisfied of the purity of his democratic faith, voted in favour of joining the Government. Four days later it was announced that the 'War Cabinet' would consist of Mr. George, of Lord Curzon, Lord President of the Council, and of two 'Ministers without Portfolio,'* Lord Milner and Mr. Arthur Henderson. Mr. Law, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, was to lead the House of Commons, and was to be also of the War Cabinet, but was 'not expected to attend regularly.' Lord Derby became Secretary of State for War. New Ministries were created for Food, Labour, Shipping, and National Service; and the Departments were headed chiefly by business men, representing railways, textiles, hardware, coal (wholesale and retail), chemicals, newspapers, oil, margarine and sugar. These appointments were hailed as a stroke of genius, evidencing a realistic spirit in administration, but few of Mr. George's discoveries retained their popularity or business reputation unimpaired after a year or two of office. The most notable exception was Lord Rhondda, and even his case hardly favoured the theory of a 'business Government,' for, as Mr. D. A. Thomas, he had shown himself by no means wanting as a politician.

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* This title is an example of Mr. George's passion for alien nomenclature. It was with difficulty that the anciently named Board of Trade escaped being called the 'Ministry of Commerce.'

But the introduction of business men was readily comprehensible; the composition of the War Cabinet was not. A body for which so much had been risked, a body which was to wield powers so enormous in a manner so absolute, was surely a body worth making august. What can only be called the shabbiness of the War Cabinet was its chief feature. Was it worth while, some of the friendliest critics of the Government could not help thinking, to overturn every precedent and tradition in order that Lord Curzon, Lord Milner, and Mr. Henderson should try to think in concert? Mr. Henderson was no doubt regarded as a mere 'token' member, representing so much Labour support. Apart from its Chairman Lord Curzon and Lord Milner were the genuine coin of the War Cabinet, and they alone could not suffice to create a large impression of wealth. Lord Milner, with the advantage of that prestige which attaches to failure if it is big and consistent enough, had the disadvantage of no following in the country and no Cabinet experience; Lord Curzon, experienced, and in many ways able, was still no demigod, and was handicapped by a temperament which had long passed into a proverb. His inclusion may have been decided with a view to reconciling him to a Lloyd George Premiership. Any other advantages, it might have been imagined, would have been attained in a far higher degree by attaching to the War Cabinet the great prestige of Mr. Balfour. Of both Lord Milner and Lord Curzon Mr. George had spoken in the past with even more contempt than hostility. They were now, ostensibly, his main reliance in 'winning the war.'

But in fact all the circumstances attending the institution of the War Council were unfavourable to gravity. Just before Christmas the new Prime

Minister, meeting the House of Commons, declared that 'you cannot run a war with a Sanhedrim.' 'That,' he said, 'is the meaning of the Cabinet of five, and one of its members doing sentry duty outside, manning the walls and defending the Council chamber against attacks while we are trying to do our work inside.' This most precious image, with its suggestion of a cloud of suspicious characters like Mr. Asquith and Mr. McKenna kept at bay only by the fixed bayonet of Mr. Law, might seem to confirm the misgivings of those who feared that the peculiar eloquence of Mr. George was not fitted to the high platform from which a Prime Minister must always speak.

In view of the facts—though they were not then accurately known—there was also a rather too pious tone in Mr. George's apologia concerning his part in bringing down the late Government :—

> 'If in this war I have paid scant heed to the call of party—although I have been as strong a Party man as any in this House—it is because I realised from the moment the Prussian cannon hurled death at a peaceable and inoffensive little country that a challenge had been sent to civilisation to decide an issue higher than party, deeper than party, wider than all parties, an issue upon the settlement of which will depend the fate of men in this world for generations when existing parties will have fallen like dead leaves on the highway.'

Mr. Asquith was clearly no more a fanatic for party than Mr. George, and the latter was not charged by his most vehement critics with infidelity to party ties. The charge was that he had at least connived at propaganda hostile to Ministers with whom, until the last minute of the eleventh hour, he had continued working. It was a charge which could be met in only one way, and condoned on only one ground. Mr. George could very well say that the thing was justified by urgent national necessity; that Mr. Asquith's Government had been impossible, that the war would have been lost had it not fallen, that its fall could only be compassed by stratagem, and that in the circumstances it would have been treason to be too fastidious. The country, judging for itself, was quite ready to accept that plea, and there was no necessity for Mr. George to advance another which savoured of ungenerosity to the defeated.

But while certain notes jarring to a sensitive taste were struck, the new Prime Minister showed himself competent on occasion to speak in those dignified tones for which Englishmen look from the men who wield supreme power. He dealt quietly but effectively with the first German peace moves.* To accept such overtures, he said with admirable succinctness, was to place our necks in a noose of which the enemy held the string. With a touch of genuine eloquence he called on the nation to 'proclaim a national Lent.'

In short, the general impression made by the new Government was good. People were not disposed to consider nicely how Mr. Neville Chamberlain, without resort to 'conscription of Labour,' was going to mobilise all the man-and-woman power of Britain and get all the round pegs into the round holes. They did not inquire too curiously why a wholesale grocer like Lord Devonport must necessarily be the best person to control the nation's food, or why a ship-owner like Sir Joseph Maclay must be the ideal guardian of the 'jugular vein of the nation.' Still less were they inclined to question the not inconsiderable constitutional innovation of a 'Cabinet' to which the Prime Minister could apparently appoint anybody he liked, and for which, as it afterwards appeared, even a non-Briton† was eligible. The public as a whole, indeed, seemed to welcome rather than otherwise the most conspicuous departures from precedent, and to applaud every detail in which the new Government differed from the old. The general tendency to belittle the retired Ministers, especially Mr. Asquith and Sir Edward Grey, was fully as marked as that to approve Mr. George, and a little magnanimity on the part of the victors would have been no less safe than graceful.

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* The notes of December, 1916, to the Pope and President Wilson.

† General Smuts.

Mr. Lloyd George at the age of 18.

The public, as usual, was broadly right, if sometimes very far off the mark in detail. It is no unjust disparagement to the defeated to say that even if the faults of the new administration had been much more serious than they were, the change was still a change for the better. The nation at the end of 1916 was suffering the spiritual analogue of physical fatigue; and the change of government acted like a new dress on the spirits of a woman in the vapours, or like a brass band on tired troops. The country simply wanted rousing, and there was no man better fitted than Mr. George to administer the necessary stimulus. His prescription was more expensive than radium, but it was a moment when there was nothing so calamitous as uninspired prudence. Mr. George's pose that all must be right with the world so long as he remained in his official Heaven was a piece of statesmanship, no less effective because it was purely instinctive.

In belittling Parliament by relegating the leadership to Mr. Bonar Law Mr. George was, on the other hand, acting deliberately and with definite purpose. Like all great demagogues, he has ended by resenting the drudgery of convincing the mob, whether it be a mob of proletarians or of the well-to-do, and it was part of his plan to make the House of Commons of small account in the waging of war and making of peace. In this he succeeded marvellously; the House, troublesome to one who respected it so profoundly as Mr. Asquith, showed in general dog-like submission to him who treated it with studied and scarcely veiled contempt. From the first Mr. George's position was not that of an old-style Prime Minister, but rather that of some South American President who, under the forms of constitutionalism, exercises the powers of a dictator. There was, however, a difference. Such a despot maintains himself mainly by means of his hold on the Army. In Mr. George's case it was literally the fact that the chief obstacle to unmitigated autocracy was the opposition of the soldiers.

For, though practically removed from Parliamentary criticism, though surrounded by docile and dependent Ministers, Mr. George was still not free to do exactly what he pleased. He could set up any likely civilian in a hotel and tell him to 'get busy' in matters affecting the liberty, property, health, and even life, of all the civilian population. He could make Orders in Council suffice for all sorts of purposes for which explicit Parliamentary sanction had formerly been deemed essential. He could get Indemnity Acts for the asking, should his subordinates be found by chance to have carried such methods to excess. In all that broad province of affairs in which the citizen had been protected, even against the Crown, by the laws of England, he had power to bind and unloose. But in his dealings with the soldiers he was still subject to check. Sir William Robertson could not be dismissed at once; neither could he be persuaded to go on a foreign mission; he remained, until he was actually turned out, a fierce watch-dog in Whitehall. However anxious Mr. George might be to make changes in strategy and high command, Sir Douglas Haig was surrounded by fences more formidable than the ramparts of Montreuil. For the public, which would endure anything for victory, was remarkably sensitive on this one point of the possible endangerment of victory by political interference, and the Press, however enthusiastic for Mr. George on broad grounds, generally reflected in this matter the deep-seated apprehensions of the nation.

In the first week of 1917, however, Mr. George advanced certain proposals at an Allied Conference in Rome. An attempt to realise his long cherished desire for an attack through Serbia was wrecked on General Cadorna's resolve not to spare another Italian soldier for that front. To the alternative proposal of an attack on Austria through Laibach, Cadorna was naturally more sympathetic, but only on conditions of British and French aid on a large scale. Such aid was pronounced impracticable by the British and French Staffs on the ground of transport alone, and for the moment Mr. George found himself in his old position—frustrated by the technical objections of the soldier.

But, just at this moment, as the novelists say, a strange thing happened. Till lately a zealot for Eastern operations, and stubbornly opposed to 'feeding the furnace' in France, Mr. George was suddenly converted to plans for a smashing blow on the Western Front. This abrupt change of conviction is easily explained. He had come under the influence, and succumbed to the charm, of General Nivelle, who in the previous November had been appointed to succeed Joffre as Commander-in-Chief of the French Army in France.

To a man of Mr. George's temperament Nivelle was irresistible. Trained in the artillery, he could fairly claim to be a scientific soldier, but, as a compatriot* has written, he was also '*le type du véritable cavalier.*' Superb dash was his, both in deed and thought. It was remembered how as a Colonel at the first Battle of the Aisne, when the infantry was in retreat, he took his guns at the gallop into the space between the retiring troops and the pursuing Germans, and saved the situation. Later his name was heroically linked with the great deeds of Douaumont and Vaux, where the enemy's plan for the capture of Verdun fell in ruins. He had now a scheme—a scheme reflecting in every detail his sanguine and daring temper—for breaking the enemy's front and exploiting to the full the possibilities of such a rupture.

Just after Mr. George became Prime Minister Sir William Robertson is said to have reported him as 'wanting a victory quickly, a victory while you wait.'† He had mentioned Damascus as a place the capture of which would have a good effect on public opinion, but did not think Beersheba would do, though Jerusalem probably might. Nivelle now offered him something far more resounding than any exploit in Biblical lands. Nivelle was no military pettifogger, thinking in half-inches on the large scale map. There was in his plan no question of a few miles of trench. He proposed to get, with a hop, skip, and jump, to Mons and Louvain, Bruges and Ghent, and to burst into Germany itself. To Mr. George he was that most welcome of all miracles, a scientific soldier without misgivings. The British

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* Commandant de Civrieux.

† Colonel Repington, 'The First World War.'

Generals were only talking about the need of more men. Pétain had gruffly stated that there were not enough troops to push operations beyond the enemy's first lines. What a refreshment to find one soldier who saw his way to ending the war without troubling about 'combing out.' Never, since Harpagon embraced Valère for declaring that the true test of a cook is his ability to serve a good dinner for very little money, was there such complete accord between patron and expert. Mr. George had told Colonel Repington in February* that he was 'not prepared to accept the position of a butcher's boy driving cattle to the slaughter.' Small wonder that he conceived the highest admiration for the military talents which promised to spare his humane nature any such cruel necessity. He readily convinced himself that Nivelle, and Nivelle alone, could bring victory in 1917. But to do so the French genius must have supreme command of the British Army, as well as the French. 'Probably,' Mr. George said to M. Berthier de Sauvigny,† 'the prestige which Field-Marshal Haig enjoys with the English people and Army will prevent him from being purely and simply subordinated to the French command; yet, if the War Cabinet recognises that this measure is indispensable, it will not hesitate to give Field-Marshal Haig secret instructions to that effect.'‡

Actually, at the Conference held at Calais on February 26th, it was agreed that from the date at which operations began, and until they terminated, Sir Douglas Haig should carry out the orders of the French Commander-in-Chief, and that in the meantime (with a right of appeal to the War Cabinet) he should conform in his arrangements with Nivelle's views. Hindenburg's retreat some days later filled the Field-Marshal with some doubts, but after another Conference he fully accepted the position of subordination, merely emphasising its temporary character.

Unhappily for the project, the French statesmen did not share Mr. George's confidence in Nivelle. M. Pain-

* 'The First World War.'

† One of the French military attachés in London.

‡ Rapport Béranger.

levé, who had applauded Mr. George's enthusiasm for vigour in Macedonia, was all for prudence on the Chemin des Dames; and was, moreover, completely under the influence of Pétain, a dour infantryman from the Pas-de-Calais, where the phlegm of an Englishman like Robertson might be considered subter-normal. In Pétain's view the Nivelle scheme was as chimerical as it was perilous, and the Russian revolution in March, with all that it foreshadowed, together with the entry into the war of the United States, confirmed him in his preference for a waiting policy. Nivelle may have been rash, Mr. George's confidence in him misplaced, but in truth he was never given a chance to succeed. He was harassed from first to last by the Ministry of War; in the actual tactics of the battle he was forced to accept civilian suggestion; he was constantly being interrupted by summonses to Paris; subordinate Generals were encouraged to criticise his orders; and inevitably disaffection spread through the rank-and-file until actual mutiny supervened.

For Mr. George it must be said that he was loyal, to the end and beyond it, to the soldier whose grand designs had captured his imagination. At the hastily convened Conference at Paris on May 4th, when most observers judged that the offensive had failed beyond redemption, he asked his French colleagues to push it 'with all the force of which the two Armies are capable.' He even adopted the argument (curious for him) that it was not good for civilians to interfere with soldiers, and long afterwards, in 1918, he expressed before the House of Commons his unabated faith in the hapless Nivelle.

It was on the very day that Nivelle was relieved of his command that Mr. Churchill, at a secret Session of the House of Commons, declared, according to a Member,* that the Allies were faced with 'the greatest danger we had been exposed to since the beginning of the war.' Mr. George contested this view, which, he said, was held neither by Haig nor by the Chief of Staff. 'Our plans,' he said, 'are proceeding with the best hopes,' and he added that 'our military leaders feel confident that this is the only strategy by which we can win.' But on May 15th General Pétain was appointed to command the French forces; for the rest of the year they acted strictly on the defensive; and Sir Douglas Haig, who automatically recovered his liberty, launched in Flanders at the end of the summer an attack with limited objective which cost close on a quarter of a million casualties.

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* Mr. Walter Roch, 'Mr. Lloyd George and the War.'

There was nothing to relieve the disappointment of a most depressing year. The Russian Armies, after a gallant attempt to combat the effects of the relaxation of discipline which inevitably followed the downfall of the Czarist *régîme*, liquefied in mutiny and 'fraternisation,' and the whole organisation of the late Empire collapsed. The Italians suffered the great disaster of Caporetto. The depredations of the submarines, the raiding activity of the enemy aircraft, reached an intensity never previously known. Every hope which Mr. George had entertained a year before was shattered.

Nevertheless, the Prime Minister successfully resisted the pessimism which had oppressed him, in far less disquieting circumstances, in subordinate office. It was not unnatural that the ex-Radical should have been delighted with the Russian Revolution in March, but even at the end of June, when General Alexeieff truly described his unhappy country as 'tottering on the brink of the abyss,' Mr. George could say at Glasgow that the 'startling events,' though temporarily to our disadvantage, were permanently for our weal :—

> 'Russia is unshackled. Russia is free, and the representatives of Russia at the Peace Congress will be the representatives of a free people, fighting for freedom, arranging the future of democracies on the lines of freedom.'

With some pride he recalled how in 1915 he had said :—

> 'To-day I see the colour of a new hope beginning to empurple the sky. The enemy in their victorious march know not what they are doing.

> Let them beware, for they are unshackling Russia. With their monster artillery they are shattering the rusty bars that fettered the strength of the people of Russia. You can see them shaking their powerful limbs free from the stifling débris, and preparing for conflict with a new spirit.'

A few months later, when the Bolsheviks used their victory to make peace with Germany, he must have regretted disinterring this prediction.

Such rhapsodies, however unjustified, were sincere. But at the very time he was thus rejoicing, with the glee of a young Socialist poet, in the unshackling of Russia, Mr. George was fastening quite competent fetters on his own people. The restriction of every kind of liberty was carried to a point before unheard of. Government interference invaded almost every department of life. The censorship, which had once only aimed at the suppression of news, was now extended to comment. At the same time 'honours' flowed in a torrent quite unprecedented. In order to avoid the too flagrant adulteration of the older companies of chivalry, new Knights, Dames and Companions were shovelled pell-mell into the *ad hoc* Order of the British Empire. But though in all this there was inconsistency, there was certainly no conscious hypocrisy.

Possibly no human being has ever possessed the equal of Mr. George's facility for being, without unwholesome strain, many different things. He can believe himself an enthusiast for freedom, while carrying to extremity his passion for authority. The creator of a new aristocracy, he can talk equalitarianism with complete conviction. With a quite exceptional liking for rich men who are little more than rich, he never feels the irony of his oft-repeated glorification of the 'cottage-bred man.' During his Premiership and before, his choice of friends and comrades would have suggested, in any other, mere cynicism. Yet Mr. George is never cynical. It is merely that he possesses the strangest capacity for dividing his life, his mind, and his very soul into water-tight compartments. He has real affinities with the men who believe in democracy, the ultimate excellence of human nature, and the simple religious ideals of the Welsh hills. But that does not prevent him from discerning the gold of human worth which for less delicate perceptions lies hidden beneath large accumulations of plutocratic coarseness and materialism. His various sets of intimates never meet, and it is intended that they shall never meet. As in his boyhood, so in his political prime, one friend, or company of friends, saw just one side of Mr. George, and no more. To no human being, probably, has it been vouchsafed to grasp him in every dimension. A political Einstein may go to the length of a tolerable working theory, but experimental verification is out of the question.

It occasionally happens, however, that an individual catches some fleeting glimpse of an aspect of Mr. George other than the one with which he is familiar, and the shock is then sometimes sufficient to shatter a lengthy friendship. Such a glimpse not alone ended the official connection, but clouded the personal relations, between the Prime Minister and a member of his first War Cabinet. Mr. Arthur Henderson, whom an Embassy to revolutionary Russia had converted from a sound trade unionist into a less dependable authority on European affairs, favoured the project of a Socialistic Conference at Stockholm, despite the ominous eagerness of the 'Kaiser's Socialists' in Germany.

The British and French Governments both decided to refuse passports to delegates, and in the circumstances it could not be a matter of complaint on Mr. Henderson's part that his colleagues should desire his resignation. But the manner of his dismissal was certainly such as to justify some resentment. Arriving punctually for a Cabinet meeting to which he had been summoned, Mr. Henderson was stopped at the door and told to wait. For a whole hour he stayed, as he put it, 'on the door mat,' his temporary substitute, Mr. Barnes, being sent out to explain that all this was for his own good. It is impossible to imagine the circumstances in which the welfare of such a Minister as Lord Curzon would have been considered in precisely the same manner. So thought Mr. Henderson, and others with him, and from this moment dated a certain restlessness in Labour. The dismissal itself might have been regarded as only an incident of the game; the manner of it rankled as a class insult.

Mr. Barnes took Mr. Henderson's place in the War Cabinet, which had been enlarged during the summer by the addition of Sir Edward Carson and General Smuts. Other changes had been made in the Government. The faithful Dr. Addison, being in trouble with Labour over 'dilution,' was relieved of the Ministry of Munitions, in which he had succeeded Mr. Montagu, and sent to the Ministry of Reconstruction, there to build castles in Spain—poor enough practice for his future task of building cottages in England. Mr. Churchill was the new Minister of Munitions; the speech in which he had lifted the corner of the veil over 'l'affaire Nivelle' had determined Mr. George to risk some Conservative resentment over the official re-flotation of one described (by an enemy) as the 'unsinkable politician.' At a moment when the prospects of the Government appeared most overcast Mr. Montagu entered it, as Secretary of State for India, declaring himself 'the only rat who had ever joined a sinking ship.' Sir Eric Geddes, to the satisfaction of most people (perhaps not excluding the military authorities in France), was made First Lord of the Admiralty, where he was soon to compass the ejection of Lord Jellicoe from the high command at sea.

For many months in 1917 there was little beyond these minor incidents of politics to stir public feeling. The French failure was not fully apprehended. To balance the Russian collapse there was the accession of America to the cause of the Allies, and, though there was disappointment, there was little of the pessimism which had reigned a year before. But towards the autumn the public awakened to the fact that there was no satisfaction, except as regarded the heroism of the troops, to be drawn from the fearfully expensive fighting on the Flanders ridges; and the breaking of the Italian front at Caporetto, followed by a disastrous retreat to the Piave, came with a shock the more violent from the sedulous care with which anodynes had been administered.

Italy, it seemed, was about to share the fate of Serbia and Rumania. There was, then, no magic in the new War Cabinet to avert disasters such as had dogged the old Sanhedrim. The state of the public mind suggested the imminence of a new political upheaval. But Mr. George was roused. He made up his mind that still another Ally must not perish because it was nobody's business to save her; secured the assent of the War Cabinet to the constitution of a new central authority for the direction of the war; and, armed therewith, went straightway to the Allied Conference at Rapallo. Immediate help was provided for the sore-pressed Italians as a matter of course, but it was in addition agreed to establish a political council of the Allies, to meet monthly at Versailles, and a Military Council to remain in permanent session. The object of these arrangements was to avoid a repetition of catastrophes due to the feeling, as Mr. George said later in the House of Commons, that the Italian front was 'not our business.' Lack of co-operation had led to the downfall of Serbia in 1915 and of Rumania in 1916. It had at least contributed to the downfall of Russia. In 1917 it had come terribly near to ending Italy's partnership in the war. It must, Mr. George resolved, now end.

On the Military Council Generals Foch, Wilson, and Cadorna were to represent their respective countries. It was a move towards that unity of command in which Mr. George had never lost faith, rightly judging that the experiment under Nivelle had not been given its fair chance. But there was acute military discontent, and once more the Prime Minister was driven to temporise. The Versailles Council was at last conceded only advisory powers, and as an assurance that even these should not be too powerfully exercised Foch was withdrawn, and Weygand, a soldier of ability but no outstanding reputation, was put in his place.

Meanwhile, Mr. George, stopping at Paris on his return from Rapallo, delivered the most sharply criticised of his war speeches. For the first time since he had become Prime Minister he spoke with some alarm and with a most distinct note of bitterness. The fault, he said, was not with our Armies. 'It has been entirely due to the absence of real unity in the war direction of the Allied countries. . . . We have never passed from rhetoric to reality, from speech to strategy.' He bitterly satirised the conception that it was 'Russia's pidgin' to do this and 'Italy's pidgin' to do that. . . .

> 'The business of Russia is to look after her own front. It is the concern of Italy to look after her own front. Am I my brother's keeper? Disastrous! Fatal! The Italian front is just as important to France and Britain as it was to Germany. Germany understood that in time. Unfortunately, we did not.'

And then, with 'brutal frankness,' he spoke of our boasted 'victories'—'when we advance a kilometre into the enemy's lines, snatch a small shattered village out of his cruel grip, capture a few hundreds of his soldiers, we shout with unfeigned joy.'

The main contentions were only too true, and probably the time had come to speak without sparing. There were, of course, holes to be picked in the speech. It was wild inconsistency, after Mr. George's enthusiasm for the Nivelle offensive, to talk about the 'futility' of 'hammering' on the Western front. Not all British and Allied victories had been so Pyrrhic as was suggested. The Eastern designs to which the orator seemed to be reverting were, perhaps, chimerical. But the main thesis of the speech was sound enough. The Kaiser had said to King Constantine, 'I shall beat them, for they have no unity of command.' But before there could be unity of command a great barrier of pride and prejudice, national and professional, had to be overborne. The Paris speech, despite its exaggerations and possible touch of unfairness, was salutary in removing the first dam.

Little more than a week after this utterance, Sir Julian Byng's success at Cambrai set the bells ringing, and Mr. George's words were momentarily forgotten. But Cambrai was only a brilliant flash in the winter of discontent, and the darkness which succeeded the failure to improve it was the more oppressive for a momentary illumination.

In the House of Commons, Mr. Asquith, consciously or unconsciously speaking for the soldiers, called in question the Rapallo policy, and criticised the Paris speech. 'If that speech was wrong,' retorted Mr. George, 'I cannot plead any impulse. I cannot plead that it was something I spoke in the heat of the moment.'

This refusal to withdraw one jot or tittle made its impression on the public, and helped to render easier, on a day as dark as any in our history, that step which, humanly speaking, was the salvation of the Allies. For his devotion, in the face of extraordinary difficulties, to the ideal of a unified command Mr. George is entitled to even more credit than he has justly received for his part in the 'affair of the Shells.'

CHAPTER XVII

Malice itself has never been tempted to the absurdity of impugning Mr. George's courage. During the war he had all sorts of dealings with all sorts of men concerning every variety of matter. Some of these men were consistently suspicious or hostile; others, after enjoying a close and flattering intimacy, retired with all the bitterness of love to hatred turned. It has been at various times the Prime Minister's business to call for the resignation of great soldiers and sailors, to dismiss political colleagues, to ordain the reversal of much cherished policies; and in many cases the circumstances have been such as to explain, if not to excuse, feelings of resentment.

A formidable list of shed intimacies might be compiled. Mr. Asquith, Sir Edward Carson, Dr. Addison, and Mr. Montagu have all left Mr. George with a deep sense of grievance. Lord Robert Cecil, who himself 'gave notice,' has gone to the length of declaring that the ideal ruler of Britain would be a person differing from the Prime Minister in every possible particular, in defects as well as qualities,* from the gifted statesman he once served. Sir Henry Wilson, who owed to the Prime Minister's discrimination, as well as to his great abilities, his rise to high office, afterwards satirised Mr. George's pretensions to strategic inspiration. Sir William Robertson has contributed to the exegesis observations of characteristic bluntness. In short, every variety of criticism which could be suggested by want of liking or want of trust has been levelled at the Prime Minister. He has been called ignorant, reckless, faithless, shallow, sloppy, inconsistent, unbusinesslike, prodigal. But nobody has suggested that he is wanting in pluck.

Some, indeed, have accused him of lacking that kind of courage which should rather be distinguished as constancy. None, at their bitterest, have gone further.

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* Speech at Hitchen, May, 1922.

Those who saw much of Mr. George during the most critical period of the war declare that his spirit never rose higher than when some great blow had descended on the Allies. He might incline to a surface pessimism when, in the view of most others, things were going quite moderately well. But when the whole fabric of the Alliance seemed on the point of dissolving in ruin, when the most calm and resolute observers were disposed to despair, his confidence seemed to be as much increased as his energy was stimulated. From time to time he thought it necessary to dwell, at the Cabinet and on the platform, on the dangers of actual defeat. But the notion of an inconclusive peace never invaded his mind; while any hope of victory remained, the fight for victory must go on. And if all hope should vanish, he once said to a colleague, there could be nothing for him but a plunge off Westminster Bridge. He had burned all his boats.

This spirit in the head of the Government was of enormous value at all times. It created the legend in every Government Department that nothing mattered but victory, and if this spirit led on the one hand to much careless spending it destroyed on the other that respect for persons which is generally a weakness of British administration. Things were not left undone simply because they might offend a great man, or a powerful interest. If the interest were too powerful, compromise might be necessary; but there was little awe of mere high-and-mightiness. If to plough up the park of a rich Radical threatened to involve a political schism the rich Radical's park was spared. But no such consideration was accorded to a Duke who was only a Duke; his deer were small deer indeed. If competence could not be insured, vigour and decision were certainly encouraged, when any Director or Controller could believe that he would almost certainly be supported if he happened to go wrong, and quite possibly if he happened to go right. But while the spirit of the Prime Minister had vast indirect influence always and everywhere, it was above all at times of crisis that his almost gay confidence in face of disaster produced its most valuable effects. There were moments when his speeches were quite literally victories, in that they actually did much to redress misfortunes in the field.

But, though there can be no doubt of Mr. George's courage, there is need of discrimination in appraising its varying qualities. He was no political Nelson. He was never afraid of the enemy. He was never afraid of the forces of use-and-wont. He might have occasional concern, but never fear, for the House of Commons. But he was sometimes sufficiently afraid of a clever individual politician to placate him at a certain cost, and he was often sufficiently afraid of the people to humour it to its own ultimate disadvantage. The man who was never known to blench in the face of the most frightful military catastrophe—though one catastrophe was to come which, though it only cleared his head, struck cold to his very heart—could often be reduced to nervousness by a by-election, a speech of calculated malice, or a newspaper paragraph.

These splendours and these limitations were equally illustrated by the events of the last year of hostilities. Mr. George was certainly at his highest, perhaps he was not far from his weakest, during the interval between the Paris speech and the general election of 1918.

The aim of the Paris speech was certainly not to create despondency. If it showed a genuine note of alarm, it betrayed no trace of panic or incertitude. Yet its immediate effect was, by exciting a wide misgiving, to rouse to new activity all forces adverse to what was called the policy of the 'knockout blow.' The vast bulk of the nation was for holding out to the end, whatever might betide. A small minority was for cutting losses and getting the best terms possible. A much larger minority, with no love for Prussianism, saw still greater dangers in the national impoverishment which must ensue if the war were to be indefinitely protracted. The rise of Bolshevism in Russia, the rise of the income-tax in Britain, had given their thoughts a new direction, or rather given new emphasis to thoughts always present.

To this last class belonged the Marquess of Lansdowne. His letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, asserting that 'some of our original desiderata have probably become unattainable,' was doubtless not intended as a manifesto in favour of peace without victory, but it was at once accepted as such by the Radical-Socialist faction which favoured immediate negotiation with an unbeaten enemy. Lord Lansdowne was promptly named by the chief organ of this body of opinion as the head of an alternative Government. However fantastic the notion of such a combination, Lord Lansdowne could not be altogether ignored. He had led the Unionist Party in the House of Lords. He had been Foreign Secretary when the Entente was negotiated. He had served in the first Coalition Government. Unchallenged, his letter, following as it did on the Paris speech, might readily have suggested to the world, as well as to the nation, that the Government was taking indirect steps, through an unattached politician of great eminence, to find how far a policy of despair might appeal to the British people.

An 'authoritative' statement was, therefore, put forth explaining that Lord Lansdowne spoke for himself alone, and Mr. George followed this up by a speech to the benchers of Gray's Inn, the calm and dignified tone of which left nothing to be desired :—

> 'The danger' (he said) 'is not the extreme pacificist. I am not afraid of him. But I warn the nation to watch the man who thinks there is a half-way house between victory and defeat. . . . Victory is an essential condition for the security of a free world. All the same, intensely as I realise that, if I thought things would get no better the longer you fought, not merely would there be no object in prolonging the war, but to do so would be infamous. . . . It is because I am firmly convinced that despite some untoward events, despite discouraging appearances, we are making steady progress towards the goal we set in front of us in 1914, that I would regard peace overtures to Prussia, at the very moment when the Prussian military spirit is drunk with boastfulness, as a betrayal of the great trust with which my colleagues and I have been charged.'

The Brest-Litovsk Treaty, proving that Germany had no intention of making an idealistic peace merely because the delegates of an enemy nation repeated the formula of 'no indemnities and no annexations,' destroyed what chance the Lansdowne movement may have had. Nevertheless, Mr. George was obliged to consider two things. There was the new Associate, the United States, with a President most sensitive regarding 'Imperialistic aims.' There was Labour, somewhat morose over the Stockholm Conference incident, disturbed by the growing food shortage, irritated still more by the defective rationing arrangements which Lord Rhondda was labouring hard (at a fatal cost to his health) to put right, and restive under the tightening control of the new bureaucracy. Some clear statement of 'war aims' seemed necessary. M. Clemenceau had defined France's aims as 'victory,' and in France that was sufficiently illuminative. In England, and still more in America, some further detail was required; and the Prime Minister took advantage of a meeting of Trade Union delegates in Westminster to set forth the objects of the Allies.

There was to be complete restoration of the independence of Belgium, and such reparation as was possible for the devastation of its towns and provinces. There was to be restoration of Serbia, Montenegro, and the occupied parts of France, Italy, and Rumania, with 'reparation for the injustice done.' There was to be 're-consideration of the great wrong of 1871,' that is, the seizure of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany. An independent Poland, comprising 'all genuinely Polish elements who desire to form part of it,' was declared an urgent necessity for the stability of Western Europe. 'Genuine self-government on true democratic principles' must be secured to the Austro-Hungarian nationalities who had long desired it; and the 'legitimate claims' of the Austrian Italians for 'union with those of their own race and tongue' must be satisfied. The same conditions were laid down for the Rumanian Irredenta. The German colonies must be held at the disposal of a Conference 'whose decision must have primary regard to the wishes and interests of the native inhabitants.' As regarded Turkey, the Dardanelles must be internationalised; Arabia, Armenia, etc., must be given recognition of their 'separate national conditions,' but we were not fighting to 'deprive Turkey of its capital or of the rich and renowned lands of Thrace,' any more than for the 'break-up of the German peoples or the disintegration of their State' or for the 'destruction' of Austria-Hungary. Nor was our policy to be regarded as 'an attempt to shift the cost of warlike operations from one belligerent to another, which may or may not be defensible.' Finally, 'a great attempt must be made to establish by some international organisation an alternative to war.'

This declaration had been framed by Mr. George after consultation with the Labour leaders, and with Mr. Asquith and Viscount Grey. Its composite authorship, together with the fact that it was written with an eye to American opinion, accounts for almost every clause being capable of more than one construction. 'Reconsideration' of the Alsace-Lorraine question, for example, might mean anything or nothing; the whole problem of Austria was really left open; the references to indemnities were as vague as well might be. It could hardly be expected that the terms would be seriously considered by Germany, then preparing her final great effort for victory. But the tone of the declaration was appreciated at Washington, and it was not unskilfully designed to break the back of the peace agitation at home. Even Mr. Philip Snowden was impelled to vouchsafe a limited commendation.

One danger—that of serious internal dissensions—had been averted at the beginning of 1918. One advantage—the cordial co-operation of the United States—had been secured. But serious difficulty was threatened in another quarter. Towards the end of 1917 the French Government had felt obliged to ask us to take over a further portion of their line. Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig both emphasised the difficulties, in view of the depleted rifle strength of the British Army, but M. Clemenceau was pressing, and as Mr. George has said, he was 'not an easy gentleman to resist.' The matter was referred to the Versailles Council, which recommended that an additional twenty-eight miles of front should be allotted to the British Army.

Always distasteful to the General Staff, the Council was now more hateful than ever, and feelings were exasperated by the announcement, on February 4, that its functions had been 'enlarged.' On the 12th Mr. Asquith raised the whole subject in the House of Commons. The functions of the Council, he said, had been advisory; now, presumably, they were executive. What exactly did that mean? Mr. George was diplomatically reticent. Mr. Asquith, he said, was asking for information which any intelligence officer on the other side would gladly pay large sums of money to get. The only definite information he would vouchsafe was that whatever decision had been made concerning the Committee's powers had been made with the approval of Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson.

Five days later it was announced through the Press Bureau that the latter had resigned. Sir William at once rejoined, through unofficial channels, that he had done nothing of the sort. He had been virtually dismissed. Utterly incapable of adapting himself to the Versailles policy, he had been given the choice of two posts. He could remain at the War Office, shorn of those special powers Mr. George had grudged him when Secretary of State for War, or he could take the place of British representative at Versailles on the Council of which he disapproved. Both offers were declined,—it was clearly impossible that either could have been accepted—and Sir William left Whitehall for the humdrum obscurity of the Eastern Command. There had, of course, to be explanations in Parliament. But the true explanation was like so many things in the Latin poets. It was 'understood.' The simple fact was that Mr. George was determined, by some means, to get real unity of command, and that Sir William, temperamentally unfitted to co-operate intimately with foreigners, was while he remained an insuperable obstacle.

The business had an incidental interest in that it revealed Mr. George's ancient confidant, Colonel Repington,* as a bitter antagonist. Colonel Repington made

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* Who had left *The Times* for the *Morning Post.*

'revelations,' was prosecuted, and fined; and as a sequel a singular alliance—or at least understanding—subsisted for some while between the leading exponent of the extreme military party and the chief prophet of the Pacificists.

Sir William Robertson's disappearance caused little ripple on the current of general opinion. Respected as honest and able, he possessed no hold on the public imagination, and the country, which had been flooded with the blunt opinions of privates and second lieutenants concerning the events after Cambrai, was not in a mood to think of a unified command as either a disaster or a humiliation. Sir William was succeeded at the War Office by Sir Henry Wilson, the one British General who, through his tact as well as his great ability, had altogether taken Mr. George's fancy. Sir Henry Rawlinson went to Versailles. Foch joined the Council as soon as its powers were enlarged. A very long step had now been taken towards the realisation of Mr. George's ideals. For Wilson and Foch were more than colleagues; they were friends who thoroughly understood each other, and Wilson was also sympathetic with Frenchmen in general.

The consummation of plans so long revolved and so patiently advanced, in face of the most formidable difficulties, was near; but events were soon to show how much had been jeopardised by the necessity Mr. George was under to advance by short stages. On March 21 the Germans launched their offensive, and General Gough's Army suffered the severest reverse that had befallen the British arms. The situation was temporarily saved by the stubborn resistance of Byng's forces on the left and by the extraordinary speed with which French troops were thrown into the gaps on the right. But it was clear that the situation was one of the deadliest danger, and that, unless the best use were made of the respite, the Allies had to contemplate no less a disaster than the separation of the British and French Armies and their defeat in detail.

The courage of Mr. George was never more finely illustrated. For perhaps the first time the chill of real terror entered his soul. Those who were about him knew how appalling was the weight of anxiety he sustained. He could apprehend the present danger as he probably did not grasp that of the 'retreat from Mons.' Then it might well seem to the non-military mind that, if all were for the moment lost, all could still be recovered in the long run. But the Armies now in jeopardy were the last Armies of France and Britain; nothing could retrieve a defeat such as threatened. But, whatever his misgivings, he did not permit them for a moment to palsy his energy, or even to abate his cheerfulness in public. Rather he was braced by the cold shock of the emergency to something above his usual level. He spoke in the tones best calculated to steady and inspire the nation. He acted with a consistent strength and decision worthy of a great man in the very crisis of his country's fate. He no longer hesitated to 'interfere' even in detail. A feeling existed at Headquarters that Gough's misfortune was so clearly a misfortune that it would be unjust to relieve him of his command. At another time Mr. George, with the Press on his mind, might have acquiesced; he had done so before. Now he stood resolutely by the view of common sense that no claims, no merits, no virtues, no record, no glamour of military fame, could compensate for the mere fact of such a misfortune. The safety of the Armies was the highest good, and all private kindness, all personal respect, must give way to a brutal but sincere logic.

But a much larger question than that of an Army Command must, Mr. George firmly decided, be resolved at once with sole reference to the same considerations. The time had come when no arguments, however powerful, must weigh against the supreme necessity of the single command.

On the 24th Lord Milner was sent to France with plenary powers and full instructions, and two days later took place the famous Conference at Doullens. It was quite a small affair—Lord Milner, Balliol culture and suavity covering something harder and more dogmatic than is usual in the English; Haig, calmly handsome, a model of military deportment; Clemenceau, inscrutable in every line of his Mongolian features; Foch, showing how it is possible to be short and stately; Wilson—unhappily fated to fall, with his honours thick upon him, by an assassin's hand—how playfulness may go with a giant's inches; a few deputies and soldiers as make-weights.

The question of a Generalissimo was at once raised. Sir Douglas Haig declared that, if Foch would consent to give his advice, he would be very glad to follow it. The time for mere 'advice,' however, had passed. 'That is not what we are talking about,' retorted Clemenceau, with a face of iron. The old French statesman took Lord Milner aside; after a rapid interchange of views the English statesman spoke a word apart to the Scottish Field-Marshal; and then Clemenceau sat down to draft the document which, after a little more discussion, took the following form :—

> 'General Foch is charged by the British and French Governments to co-ordinate the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front. He will make arrangements to that effect with the two Commanders-in-Chief, who are requested to furnish him with all the necessary information.'

So simply was the great business at last transacted. Naturally enough there was little elation mingling with the British correctitude. Equally, of course, the French showed themselves frankly pleased. As the Conference was breaking up, a French Minister laughingly remarked to Foch, 'You have your papers now, General,' 'Yes,' replied Foch, grimly, 'and a pretty time to give them to me.'

It will probably be the verdict of history that Mr. George's part in placing the Allied Armies under the control of one man—and that a great military genius—constitutes his highest claim on the gratitude of the British people, while his superiority to all pettifogging notions about national dignity should give him an indefeasible title, whatever differences of view on other questions, to the respect and regard of the French. No less admirable than the constancy with which Mr. George clung to his conviction was the courage with which he made use of every opportunity to give it effect. For it was no light risk he was undertaking. He had to deal with a people exceptionally sensitive in such matters, a people capable of high generosity, but rather specially prone also to low and irrational suspicion, a people with no recent experiences of great alliances, and with old memories of alliances in which their part was that of paymasters and dictators of policy. He had to take count also of a military tradition precisely reflecting this chivalrous but aloof and disdainful character.

In peace time the nation had always been disposed to back the army against the politician, and it was not alone that Mr. George must fear, if he pressed too hard or too soon, an explosion of military discontent which, adroitly used by a section of the Press, might have blown him in an instant from power. Even though a French Generalissimo had been quietly accepted by the soldiers, the circumstances might be easily conceived in which the arrangement would have roused fury in the people. Whenever it should be necessary to impose a heavy and bloody task on British troops the murmur would have gone round that British blood was cheap to a Frenchman, and that this was both a safe and a profitable revenge for Waterloo. The same sort of things were said about Dutch commanders of British troops in the seventeenth century; and even in this war the great sacrifices of the French had not altogether ensured them against occasional suggestions that an undue weight was being selfishly and callously imposed on the British Ally.

In view, therefore, of the great dangers attaching to a premature attempt to realise unity of command, Mr. George is not to be blamed because the calamity of March 21 was not averted or mitigated by an earlier appointment of the great soldier whom he and Clemenceau had come to recognise as the only possible counterpoise to the talents and energies of Ludendorff. The hostility of the military party, fears that it might be supported by public opinion, obliged the Prime Minister to work with caution and concealment, while never weakening in his conviction, or in his resolve ultimately to translate his ideals into fact. The

Versailles Council had first to be established. Then its authority had unostentatiously to be increased. In Whitehall Wilson had to be substituted for Robertson. All these things were done cleverly and without mishap. But even so it required a reverse, threatening the loss of all, to enable the British and French Prime Ministers to complete the work they had in mind. Foch was only given his 'papers' when there was a quite considerable probability that even he could do nothing with them.

Happily, however, things had not gone too far, and the appointment was almost immediately justified by its effects. Pétain's reserves were thrown into the breach before Amiens, and the German advance on Paris was checked, while in the following month, when the Germans broke our line on the Lys, Haig had not only his own reserves to use, but French reinforcements were sent as readily as though the danger had been in Champagne or the Vosges. At Montreuil, though the new situation was accepted with loyalty, it was certainly not regarded with enthusiasm; no diplomacy could efface the impression that a slight had been cast on British generalship, with the approval of a British Prime Minister. But in the ranks there was little disposition to lament the change. The ordinary 'temporary' soldier had no professional prejudices, and from personal observation of many small facts he had acquired a certain respect for French methods.

At home also, a great part of the public, influenced by the reports of returning soldiers, or stunned into acquiescence by a sense of the awful character of the emergency, was in no way critical. There was, however, a carefully concerted attack on the Prime Minister which merits notice chiefly because it led to the virtual elimination of the Liberal Party as an independent political force. The question was raised whether General Gough had not been made a scapegoat. The Prime Ministers of Great Britain and France, backed by their creature, the Versailles Council, were, it was argued, the parties really responsible for the disaster of March 21. They had forced Haig to extend his line without giving him the requisite reinforcements; on Gough was imposed an impossible task; and that he had not accomplished it merely proved that he was no magician. Why should the unfortunate General, the owner of a peculiarly revered name, be relieved of his command, while those who had condemned him in advance to failure were free from all censure, and even acted as his self-righteous judges?

As so often happens, Mr. George presented to these critics a case unassailable in the main, but vulnerable in detail. It was natural that the French, after their losses in 1917, should be unable to hold as much of the front as in the past. Great Britain was the only Power which could supply the deficiency, and Mr. George would have been unfaithful to every great interest in his charge if, after the report of the Versailles Council, he had refused the French request. On the other hand, there is little doubt that Gough was asked to face a situation of extraordinary difficulty and danger with unduly slender resources. Whether he would have been equal to it with larger resources, or whether he made the best use of the resources actually to his hand, were, obviously, questions for discussion by the expert alone. The only point which Mr. George's political critics could properly make was that he had not provided to the utmost extent possible in the circumstances for an emergency which could be foreseen, and was in fact foreseen.

For the German blow was not a surprise. Mr. George afterwards quoted Sir Henry Wilson as declaring, in January 1918, that the Germans were about to concentrate all their resources opposite the British line with a view to severing the British and French Armies. Time and spot were indicated with extraordinary accuracy, and Mr. George did not err in describing the prediction as 'one of the most remarkable in the history of military strategy.' Yet as late as March 7th, only a fortnight before the great blow fell, Mr. Law, a member of the War Cabinet, could own himself 'still a little sceptical' about the threatened offensive, and could state that if it came the enemy would have no 'dangerous superiority' on the Western Front.

In August, 1918, Mr. George, speaking in the House of Commons concerning Gough's defeat, dwelt with justifiable pride on the energy with which reinforcements were pushed into France after this reverse. 'Before the battle was over,' he said, 'in a fortnight's time, 268,000 men were thrown across the Channel—one of the most remarkable efforts of British shipping, of organisation of British transport, and, let us say, of the War Office. In a month's time 355,000 men had been thrown across the Channel.' Why, it will at once be asked—and the question was the basis of all criticism on the subject—were not some of these men sent before, and not after, the anticipated German blow? Did Mr. George neglect the prediction of Sir Henry Wilson which he afterwards eulogised as showing such extraordinary judgment? Or was he husbanding troops for some enterprise apart from the Western Front at a time when the initiative had clearly passed to the enemy?* Either explanation is possible; Mr. George may well have been as wrong on other military questions as he was supremely right on that of an undivided command; there must always be danger, as there may sometimes be advantage, in civilian ascendancy in military councils.

But a third explanation is at least equally plausible. After the shock of March 21st raw boys and men of medically low category were hurried to the front without protest from the public. Six weeks previously energy taking such a form might have provoked a popular storm. The possibility was not such as to be weighed seriously in the balance against an adequate insurance of the Western Front. Sniping annoyances might be feared, but no such convulsion as would alone have justified the acceptance of a certain military risk as a lesser evil. Events proved that the influence of all the possibly hostile forces was trivial, and that the heart of the country was thoroughly sound. But it is just in regard to such matters that the Welsh courage of Mr. George, often so fine in its dash, is apt to falter. His schemes and stratagems, his waitings on events, the curvilinear character of his progress towards an appointed end were sometimes, as in the matter of unity of command, justified by necessity. But it was not always so. More often they are to be explained by the simple fact that he is a democrat who sometimes has to trust the people, but would much rather not.

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* This is the suggestion of Colonel Repington, 'The First World War.'

The discontents of the military party, and the manœuvres of the politicians who used it, or were by it used, came to a head in May, when what is known as the Maurice debate stereotyped political divisions. General Maurice, who had been Director of Military Operations, had charged the Prime Minister with misleading the country and the House of Commons with regard to the strength of the British Army in France on the eve of the German attack. Unfortunately for himself and his followers, Mr. Asquith, taking a serious view of these allegations, decided to move for a Select Committee to inquire into them. Mr. Law, the leader of the House, at first promised inquiry by two judges, acting as a 'Court of Honour'; but this rather absurd proposal was withdrawn, and on second thoughts it was decided to treat the matter as one of confidence.

The ensuing debate showed that Mr. Asquith had been ill advised and worse instructed. It is true that the Prime Minister's defence of the figures he had previously given to the House was by no means completely satisfying. He had said that our Army in France was 'stronger' at the beginning of 1918 than at the beginning of 1917; it appeared that he had merely meant 'more numerous,' since the actual rifle strength was less. He had talked of the small number of white divisions employed in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Palestine, but it appeared that there were many white troops on the ration strength of the coloured divisions. He had talked of two divisions withdrawn from Salonika, the inference being drawn that they had returned to France, whereas in fact they had been sent to another theatre of operations in the East. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister had no difficulty in winning the sympathy of the House and the country. When he complained that he had been 'drenched by cocoa slops'; when he asked solemnly, as a man charged with almost crushing burdens, that there should be 'an end to sniping,' a conclusion to these 'distracting, paralysing, rending' controversies while fate was in the balance, the general common sense applauded. It was felt that, however important may be a correct rendering of the accounts of a Fire Brigade, the appropriate moment for cross-examining the chief fireman is not when he is putting out a fire. And when Mr. George argued that the real lesson to be drawn from the controversy about extending the British line was 'the importance of unity of command' he spoke the simple truth. Haig and Pétain had been on good enough terms, but naturally each was anxious over his special charge, and there was bound to be occasional trouble until Foch had in black and white his authority to 'co-ordinate the action of the Allied Armies.'

The effect of the Maurice debate was an immense and lasting increase in the strength of the Government. The feebleness of the Parliamentary Opposition was fully exposed, and—what was still more important—it was henceforth handicapped by a suspicion of which it could not complain (for its own imprudence was at fault), but which it did not entirely deserve. It would be unjust to charge against Mr. Asquith anything worse than a strange blindness. Some of the forces to which he unwittingly lent his aid and the respectability of his name were in truth sinister, and their success would have gravely endangered that close Anglo-French co-operation on which the fate of civilisation depended. Mr. Asquith acted, no doubt, merely out of the enthusiasm of a political purist maintaining the rights of the House of Commons to full and accurate information. But in doing so he did in fact ally himself with an attempt to destroy the Government at a moment appallingly critical. The full extent of his penalty was only apparent seven months later, when the Liberal Party was almost exterminated. The Maurice debate decided in advance the verdict of the general election.

Meanwhile, on the morrow of the Somme Battle, Mr. George had introduced a new Conscription Bill raising the age for military service and extending compulsion to Ireland. Its results were neither great nor, on the whole, beneficial. Some of the older men brought into the Army may have proved useful behind the lines, but, except in the trenches, there was no deficiency of man-power. Irish conscription brought no men to the colours; it possibly deprived the Army of a few Volunteers; and by completing the ruin of the friendly Nationalist party, it certainly contributed more than anything to give political mastery in Southern Ireland to the hostile Sinn Fein faction.

Of more effect was the 'combing-out' of industries, to which the emergency gave a sudden impetus. Fifty thousand men were taken from the coal mines alone.* The largeness of the figure suggests once again the Prime Minister's dislike, in such matters, of moving much in advance of public opinion. With much of the temper of an autocrat, and a strong relish ever for the ostentation of power, he united something of the caution of those French tyrants who, while decimating the nobility, were timorous of anything that hit the people. Often he might be described as a dictator who left necessity to do the dictating.

Such being his tendencies, it is the more to his credit that after the March offensive he acted not only with vigour, but with consistent disregard of the kind of risk he was most prone to refuse. If he had neglected to order enough petrol in the ordinary course for the military machine, he at least lost no time, and shirked no risk, in knocking up everybody in the middle of the night for an emergency supply. Thus it required real boldness to ring the bell of the American garage, and much tact to prefer the necessary demand. As Mr. George put it at Edinburgh, the war had become, for the time being, a 'race between General Hindenburg and President Wilson.' So far it had been an accepted principle of Anglo-French diplomacy that America must on no account be hustled; all dangers were to be preferred to that of offending the susceptibilities of the new Associate. The emergency of the 'Kaiser's Battle' made such delicacy absurd; men threatened with death have at least one advantage—they can be frank even to their best friends. Mr. George at once decided to speak frankly to the United States.

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* The Prime Minister's statement in the House of Commons.

By a happy chance Mr. Barker, the American Secretary for War, was in London, and the Prime Minister, with Mr. Balfour, waited on him with an urgent representation that the combatant strength of the American forces in France should be forthwith placed in the line. The Americans were not ready to fight as an Army. The concession of the British request meant, therefore, that they must be split up, and that their battalions must be brigaded with the Allies. The sacrifice of national pride involved was even greater than that which had made so difficult the appointment of a Generalissimo; and with a people so sensitive as the Americans the danger of offending their susceptibilities was by no means negligible. It is to the honour of President Wilson that he at once took the risk, and to the glory of the American people that they accepted and applauded his decision. But too much credit can hardly be given to Mr. George that he had even dared to ask.

With equal wisdom and courage he accepted the not inconsiderable hazard of using all available British shipping to transport American troops still at home to France. 'I shall never forget that morning,' he has said,* 'when I sent a cable to President Wilson telling him what the facts were, and how essential it was that we should get American help at the speediest possible rate, inviting him to send 120,000 infantry and machine-gunners per month to Europe; if he did this we would do our best to help carry them. President Wilson replied, "Send your ships across, and we will send the 120,000 men." Then I invited Sir Joseph Maclay, the Shipping Controller, to Downing Street, and said "Send every ship you can." They were all engaged in essential trades, because we were cut down right to the bone. There was nothing which was not essential. We said, "This is the time for taking risks." We ran risks with our food and we ran risks with essential raw materials. We said, "The thing to do is to get the men across at all hazards." America sent 1,900,000 men across, and out of that number 1,100,000 were carried by the British mercantile marine.'

We have here a good example of the very real virtues of Mr. George's war control—virtues which compensated for (as indeed they alone made possible) the persistence of much incidental inefficiency and extravagance. The abandonment of Cabinet responsibility, the latitude given to subordinates not always well chosen, was bound to result in much caprice, and there were times when Mr. George's administration was very much like that of Harun al Raschid, in that the most innocent things suddenly became crimes, and 'one-eyed calenders' were abruptly elevated to positions of influence. But it had also the virtues of its defects. It might be wasteful, slovenly, inconsecutive, cursed with those special vices which were indicated in the perpetual call for 'co-ordination.' But it had also vision, vigour, high courage.

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* Speech in Leeds, December 7th, 1918.

In short, it reflected most faithfully the character of its chief. Both qualities and defects are traceable to the peculiarities which make Mr. George the supreme example of the political impressionist. Or perhaps one should rather say that he is like one of those artists who, while they filled whole galleries with gigantesque school pictures, have left no perfect work of their own. 'Dutch finish' is not his line; he more resembles that Italian miracle who was called 'Fa Presto' from the amazing celerity with which he turned out canvases on which others would have worked for years. He conceives his duty done when he has supplied the enormous outlines of a design; the filling up is left to subordinates. No man understands better—few men have abused more—the art of leaving a labourer's work for a labourer's hand. Mr. George can concentrate into a couple of days the effort necessary to devise and start a political machine; once it is set going his interest ceases until it goes spectacularly wrong. Not that he idles; he is ready for, he hungers for, another problem, and under his system there is never any lack of problems. For it is a system which can only work perfectly with perfect instruments, gifted with genius at least equal to his own, yet with so little ambition that they will always remain content to be instruments. Such a combination is rare, and despite Mr. George's nose for ability (and even silent ability) his instruments are often not distinguished for judgment. Half his time as chief director of the war was thus necessarily spent in clearing up messes caused partly by defects in design and partly by the faulty execution of imperfectly understood instructions. Even his talent and force of character could never suffice to impart to his administration the strength and unity of a combination of able men, not creatures but colleagues, who are inspired but not enslaved by one superior mind. This is only to say that Mr. George's peculiar form of autocracy could not escape the characteristic defects of autocracy in general. But every form of autocracy has some special advantages, and this form was no exception. Mr. George's faculties were unequal—as any one set of faculties must be—to the task of seeing after every aspect of a transaction so enormous; and circumstances (in which his own disposition, jealous of any competing splendours, must be included) decreed that most of those entrusted with the details of administration should be men of rather light equipment. The singular nature of the Administration, however—the very want of strong individuality in its members, the very fact of their intellectual and moral subjection—was of advantage in a great emergency. Once the Prime Minister had recognised that a thing must be done, he had only to give his orders, and it was done. This was the one superiority of the Cabal over the Sanhedrim. But it could be, on occasion, decisive.

Under Mr. Asquith's regime this question of the shipping for American troops would have been debated from every point of view. The shipping experts would have proclaimed it impossible; the naval experts would have stated all sorts of eloquent objections; the military experts would have condemned it as meaning no leave, the food experts as meaning no bread, the business experts as meaning no trade, the finance experts as meaning no revenue. After weeks of disputation on these lines Mr. Wilson would have been offered a quarter of the shipping he wanted, and meanwhile the Germans might well have got their decision. Mr. George arranged the affair in a few minutes, took all the responsibility on his own shoulders, and merely ordered his subordinates to do their part.

In thus dealing with the United States, frankly and without regard to the commonplaces of international etiquette, Mr. George had on his side the newly confirmed doctrine of unity of which Foch was the symbol. Since British pride had been subordinated to the common cause he could, with consistency and without offence, ask that an even more sensitive people should consent to a still more trying submission.

The American sacrifice, like our own, was richly rewarded. From that time, though there were still checks to our arms, though the Allies were once again to be pushed back to the Marne, tendencies never ceased to improve. If Mr. George had done nothing else, the gratitude of all free peoples would still be due to him for forging, even so late, the only possible key to victory. So far as the unity of command was his work—and it would have been quite unattainable without his persistent effort—he can be honestly acclaimed as the British Carnot, the organiser of the Allies' victory.

Yet all his efforts might have miscarried but for the happy accident that the man for the work was there, and that he was a man who, knowing his work to admiration, would brook no outside tampering with it. It has been said that Foch imposed two conditions before he consented to take command. One was that his luncheon hour should be respected. The other was that his plans must be absolutely his own. He knew something of the evils of any division of authority in war. Unity of command had proved no panacea when there was a Nivelle at one end of the telephone and a Painlévé at the other. But Foch, once those 'papers' were in his pocket, was a polite Sphinx, and Clemenceau, who had laboured to get the papers for him, would neither interfere nor permit interference. During these last months, when the German effort was dodged, checked, exhausted, and finally broken in irretrievable ruin, Foch directed all. Clemenceau actually performed the services Mr. Law was supposed to render to the British War Cabinet; he kept off the flies. Mr. George wisely confined himself to giving the great emprise his distant benediction.

From the early summer to the late autumn of 1918 he disappears from the centre of the picture. His war work was nearly done when Lord Milner, acting as his deputy, handed over the fortunes of the Allies to the greatest of modern soldiers. It was quite finished when, having defeated faction at home, he ensured the speedy and effective help of the American troops. We have no hint of him as a strategist during the summer of 1918. What Robertson had said with the utmost possible bluntness a greater than Robertson had never to put into words. Mr. George was perfectly aware that he had been relieved of his command, knew also that it had passed to one who not only could, but must, be trusted.

Even in the diplomatic exchanges which preceded the German collapse Mr. George has little part; it is President Wilson who cross-examines Prince Max of Baden, and sets forth the Allies' requirements and aspirations; what it is necessary for Great Britain to add is mostly said by Mr. Balfour. Meanwhile Mr. George has been 'scanning the horizon' at Manchester, and finds 'flashes on the sky which indicate that there are grave atmospheric disturbances in the social and economic world'—in view of which he proposes more social reform, for we 'cannot maintain an A.1 Empire on a C.3 population.' We must have 'better houses more education, higher wages, fully cultivated land, skilled essential industries.'

In short, Mr. George foresees the end of one kind of war and is looking forward to the beginning of another. In his bed at the Manchester Town Hall—where he is laid up for some days with a chill—he spends 'sixteen hours out of every twenty-four' in reading all sorts of printed matter, from State papers to novels. But it would be strange, indeed, if the most thrilling masterpiece of Mr. Oppenheim did not sometimes drop from his hand as he reflected that the Parliament of 1910 had lasted nearly eight years, that it must in decency be soon dissolved, that there was an enormous new electorate to be educated, and that the coming of peace might bring re-actions fatal to the political combination to which he owed his influence. The main lines of the political campaign which was to prolong the life of the

War-made Coalition were no doubt decided long before the last shot was fired in France.

Mr. George re-appears on the military stage when the terms of the armistice are being discussed in Paris. On the eve of his departure from London he had debated the question with Sir Douglas Haig, who was gloomy as to the state of the Army; unless it could be restored to strength the war, he held, could not be continued. At a military conference at Senlis, indeed, Haig had suggested the greatest moderation, believing as he did that the Germans in a military sense were yet unbroken. The British Commander would have been satisfied, it would seem, with the evacuation of France, Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine, and the restitution of French and Belgian rolling-stock.

It is, therefore, a scarcely buoyant Prime Minister who arrives on French soil. But when he hears Foch declare his own stringent terms, which would effectively deprive Ludendorff of any hope of 'resumption of hostilities on our borders,' he passes from one extreme to the other. Assured by Foch's confidence that victory is indeed won, he questions whether the conditions are sufficiently severe, is attracted by the American General's notion of leaving the Germans 'only their eyes to weep with,' and argues for complete demobilisation and disarmament. Marshal Foch, standing between Haig on the one hand and Mr. George and General Pershing on the other, calmly indicates the practical difficulties. Complete demobilisation implies the complete occupation of Germany. Will the statesmen provide him with the necessary troops? Finally, he declares that the acceptance of his own terms is quite sufficient—'Our aims are accomplished; none has the right to shed another drop of blood.'

Mr. George, thus brought to earth, accepts readily enough the cool wisdom of the great soldier. He has had his foretaste of the truth that even victory has its limitations, that making peace is scarcely a simpler business than making war.

CHAPTER XVIII

On the evening of the last day of perhaps the most wonderful week in the history of civilised mankind, Mr. George was guest of the Lord Mayor of London at the Guildhall. He had just returned from Versailles, where he had spent 'a great week.' In the beautiful forests, he said, 'the leaves were falling, but these were not alone. Empires and Kingdoms and Kings and Crowns were falling like withered leaves before a gale.' The contrast between the spring and the fall of the leaf was, he declared, the most dramatic in history. In the Spring the enemy was everywhere triumphant; now we had seen 'the Turkish Armies annihilated by a combination of brilliant strategy, dash, valour, and organisation; Bulgaria occupied from the mountains to the sea, its treacherous king a fugitive; Austria, then entrenched on Italian soil, shattered, broken; Germany, the last and greatest of our foes, has through dauntless heroism and gifted leadership been hurled back, and an Army which was once the most formidable of the world is hardly an Army at all. Its Navy is certainly no longer a Navy.'

The Kaiser and Crown Prince had abdicated and fled; 'they are gone; let that suffice. Their own people have condemned them, and I wish to add no word to that condemnation.'

As to the German people, it must not be forgotten that they cheered their rulers, and would have cheered them to-day if they had won. We sought no yard of 'real German soil'; we were not going to commit the folly of 1871; but the reckoning must be stern; we had no intention of interfering with the freedom of the German people, but we intended to secure beyond doubt the freedom of our own. 'We shall do no wrong; we will abandon no right.'

So far Mr. George spoke with a loftiness worthy of his great argument. But even at that moment, despite the real awe he doubtless shared with the commonest men concerning the apocalyptic drama which he described, he was unable to omit a chuckle of personal triumph. He had referred to the 'props' of Germany which had been successively knocked from under her.

'Forgive me for referring to the side-shows,' he continued. 'I have waited for this hour. I have been supposed to have been advocating little side-shows which frittered away the strength of this country upon unhelpful enterprises. You know now why. We wanted to get round by the back door to Germany. It helped those who were battering at the front door.'

Forty-eight hours later London was deliriously celebrating the signature of the Armistice. The Prime Minister, who had given his blessing to its noisy rejoicing, himself showed a finer sense of the fitness of things. He spent the evening with his wife and daughter at a *Cymanfa Ganu*, or singing festival, at the Westminster Chapel, where he exercised his admirable voice in the rendering of hymns fitted to the occasion.

These three facts—or rather what they indicate—may be borne in mind with advantage in the story of the peace-making. There is in Mr. George an instinct of high statesmanship which seldom fails, when he is genuinely interested in a question, to discern the course of true wisdom. There is a sense of responsibility to something higher than 'public opinion' which, though it lacks the authority of a dogmatic creed, is still most powerful on occasion, and is seldom wholly without influence on his actions. But there is also something not easy to define which is seldom found in a very great man. It is not merely egotism; there have been many great egotists with little or nothing of this peculiarity. It is not a mere vulgar craving for applause; Mr. George's intelligence is quite strong enough to recognise that his failing must often weaken the applause which is best worth having. But whatever it may be called it is a fundamental part of his character, and can never be ignored. It is sometimes a strength, in that it prevents him ever being embarrassed by his own past. It is sometimes a weakness, affecting his judgment of facts. But, strength or weakness, Mr. George's foible of infallibility is always unhealthy. No man was ever the better for believing himself always right; every man is distinctly the worse for claiming to be always right. The dogma of Georgian infallibility, unfavourable to virility in those of its professors who happen to be Mr. George's followers, has had unhappy reactions on Mr. George himself. In order to appear always right, he has often found it necessary to show that somebody else is wrong; and nothing is so august—whether it be a man or a nation or a principle—that it cannot be made to serve as a scapegoat. It is not easy to point to a single instance in which Mr. George has said, quite simply, 'I was wrong, and for my error I alone am responsible.' He has sometimes admitted the failure of a particular scheme, and even, as in the case of the land taxes, he has joined heartily in the laugh against himself. But there is always the implication that there would have been no failure but for the fault of others who impeded, or over-ruled, or inadequately supported. A king can do no wrong because in theory he can do nothing. Mr. George, a king who does everything, has too uniformly claimed the privilege of diverting all blame from himself to his agents or collaborators. This characteristic, which is not incompatible with much generosity and with a genuine desire to stand by a colleague in trouble, has always to be remembered, and is the secret of much that followed the Armistice.

During the war Mr. George had definitely ceased to be a party politician, and any of the specialised dexterities attaching to that character which he might occasionally display could be always, and generally with justice, explained by his intense desire to save his country, and his intense conviction that the country could only be saved by himself. In the late autumn of 1918, however, the politician reappears, and we are henceforth not at liberty to consider the Prime Minister in the character of The Hero as Statesman. It is occasionally our less pleasing task to contemplate the qualities of the Genius as Electioneer. The manifesto which purports to embody a policy can no longer be accepted at precisely its face value; it must be scrutinised as an election address. The erect attitude appropriate to the restorer of a shattered world is modified by a certain stooping of the head inseparable from the business of vote-catching.

Mr. George cannot be blamed for wanting a new Parliament. The old House of Commons had existed since 1910; it was quite out of touch with the country; its life had been prolonged again and again by measures excused by necessity but dangerous as precedents; and it was out of the question that there should be a further indefinite extension of its existence. A new Parliament was wanted, if only to ensure the Peace, and a new Parliament genuinely representing the nation would have been of enormous value. The last thing Mr. George wanted, however, was a House of Commons reflecting with reasonable accuracy the views of the people on things in general. What he wanted was a House of Commons reflecting the country's views on one subject only—himself. In the opinion of nine people out of ten he had, whatever might be the truth about this detail or that, deserved well of his country, and with the greater part of this vast majority that was sufficient reason for giving him a new lease of power. The only election address needed was, 'With great effort we Ministers have achieved victory; empower us to attack the scarcely less difficult task of achieving peace.' The people would have done the rest in their own way—a much better way than they were forced to take.

But, acting on perhaps the least happy inspiration of his later life, Mr. George deliberately set about the elimination of all that could be called an Opposition, all that could act as a check on the Government, all that could provide an alternative administration. His mind was set on stereotyping that political combination which had permitted of his personal ascendancy. So far he had owed an authority unparalleled since the days of Cromwell to a purely temporary sentiment—to the feeling that the war must be won, and that he was the statesman most likely to win the war. But now the war was at an end; the frost of terror which had made so many strange places passable had given out; to-morrow there might be a rapid thaw, and mere quagmire where there was now solid ground. Mr. George decided in favour of a freezing-mixture of his own, and invented the formula that the Coalition which had won the war was necessary, not only to 'win the peace,' but to create a new Britain. The war alliance of parties must not only be continued until the Peace Conference had concluded its labours—a quite reasonable plea. It must be made permanent. Every domestic question must henceforth be approached in the same spirit of 'unity' that facilitated the making of war. In 1915 everybody wanted shells, and shells were got; there would have been no shells had the getting of them been made the subject of an 'organised quarrel.' But were shells more important than a richer, happier, healthier, more productive Britain?

What Mr. George would not or could not see was that there was no common term between the problems of war and those of peace. Given the desire to win a war, every type of intelligence must come to much the same conclusion about the desirability of having good ammunition, and plenty of it. But there must necessarily be infinite variation of view as to whether it is better national policy to grow corn than to feed cattle; whether revenue shall be raised by direct or by indirect taxation; whether houses shall be built by the State or whether their construction shall be left entirely to the law of supply and demand; whether Irish or Indian agitators shall be treated to a 'whiff of grapeshot' or to a dose of constitutional reform. In all political matters there are infinite gradations between the unqualified affirmative and the blunt negative; and a 'Coalition' between extremes does not mean steady progress along a fixed line representing a medium view. It simply means deadlock if the balance of forces is perfect; otherwise it means caprice or imbecility.

Nevertheless, Mr. George, with his genius for 'building flying bridges between incompatibles,' had no difficulty in making out a plausible case. He did so by the very simple method of assuming—what the general public is quite willing to assume—that there is no kind of sincerity in the war of political parties. With charming frankness—since the confession was not a serious *mea culpa*

—he represented himself as the converted sinner. The time had been when he, as a party man, played fantastic party tricks, against his better judgment, before high Heaven. But that was when things were less serious; now he had learned wisdom, and had no patience with mere 'organised fault-finding.'

Eliminate opposition—such was his argument—and all is possible in the way of reform and reconstruction. Fail to eliminate opposition, and the chance of reform and reconstruction will perish in a barren quarrel over non-essentials. At Westminster on November 16th Mr. George enlarged on the advantages of Government by experts carrying out a policy representing the greatest measure of agreement that could be reached as between the two parties—Labour had now virtually withdrawn—in the Coalition. Thus the Unionists were to have preference on tea and coffee, but there were to be no food taxes. Thus Irish 'aspirations' were to be satisfied, but the veto of Ulster was apparently to remain. On 'social reform' the Prime Minister's inspiration seemed to be accepted by his Conservative colleagues. Thus at Wolverhampton, on November 23rd, we find Mr. George proclaiming that Britain must be made 'a fit country for heroes to live in'; that the slums must go; that the land must be cultivated to its full capacity; that a systematic effort must be made to bring back the population to the countryside; that ex-soldiers and sailors must be settled on the land; that for transport the State must 'make itself responsible'; that 'inhuman conditions and wretchedness must surrender like the German Fleet.'

In brief the Government committed itself to a system which, whether or not it could be called Socialism, was certainly paternalism of the most pronounced kind. No doubt some of the highly respectable Tories among Mr. George's colleagues were a little bewildered. Mr. Walter Long,* for example, dwelt on the difficulty of getting a large new population on the land when 'most of the good land was already occupied.' Others, again, no doubt acquiesced with mental reservations. These things might look well in an election programme, but was there any necessity to carry them out? It would really seem that, in fear of 'Bolshevism'—'there were revolutionary elements,' said Mr. George, 'making for anarchy'—the chiefs of the Conservative Party did in the main, and for the moment, accept Mr. George's remedy as a dismal necessity of the situation. Individualism was renounced; the State was pledged to all kinds of interference with trade and industry. Mr. Churchill, without repudiation, made statements which could only suggest an intention to nationalise the railways, and such a declaration was in perfect accord with the tone of the Government's considered manifestos.

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* Afterwards Lord Long of Wraxhall.

But it was soon found that remote Utopias interested the country less than the pressing question—what was to be done with Germany? President Wilson, in his telegraphic exchanges with Prince Max of Baden, had indicated willingness for a peace on the conditions laid down in his Fourteen Points and various other pronouncements—a peace with 'no annexations, no contributions, no punitive damages'; a peace in which every territorial settlement should be 'made in the interest and for the benefit of the populations concerned,' and not as a part of any mere adjustment or compromise of claims among rival States; 'no special or separate interest of any single nation or group of nations to be made the basis of any settlement which is not consistent with the common interest of all;' 'no leagues or alliances or special covenants and understandings within the general and common family of the League of Nations;' and so forth. On the other hand, the 'wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871' must be righted, and a free Poland constituted with access to the sea. It was stipulated also that Germany should 'restore all invaded territory.'

These terms were referred to the Allied Governments by the President, and an important addition was made to the effect that compensation must be made by Germany 'for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies and to their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air.' The terms as amended were accepted by Germany, and the armistice was arranged on this general basis. The apparent limitation of damage was at once challenged in England; it was pointed out, in at least one quarter,* that the 'damage' done to 'civilians and their property' by a five or six shilling income-tax during many years was a much more important item than the ships and cargoes sunk by enemy submarines or the houses blown up by enemy aeroplanes. Nevertheless Mr. George concurred in the terms stated, without any endeavour to enlarge them so as to include the more serious losses due to the war.

As to the other terms, if interpreted in one spirit, they permitted the Allies to make re-arrangements in the map of Europe, sufficient to give security against any German menace in future, which would have inflicted no intolerable hardship on any particular population; if interpreted in another spirit, they would, of course, have absolved Germany from any substantial penalty, and put her in a position of absolute advantage certainly over France, and probably over all the victorious Powers.

It will be seen, therefore, that the Allies were in advance estopped (accepting the 'damage' clause on the face value of its wording) from claiming any part of the actual cost of the war; they were much less definitely embarrassed, despite the declarations of Mr. George and President Wilson, in the matter of securing the good behaviour of the Prussianised Empire by steps less harsh indeed than, but similar in kind to, those which were actually taken to remove the menace of the Hapsburg monarchy. But on the face of things it appeared that the author of the war, the author of so many foul deeds in the war, was likely to come off not only better than her unfortunate Allies, but certainly not worse than some of the victors.

British opinion was deeply moved, and by a far less ignoble impulse than certain writers would have us believe. The eighteenth chapter of the Book of Revelations affords a curiously exact picture of what happened when it was proclaimed 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen.' The multitude really felt that Babylon's sins had 'reached unto heaven,' and that God had 'remembered her iniquities;' and its disposition was to concur in the justice that would 'reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works; in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.' But there were 'kings of the earth' who lamented for her when they saw 'the smoke of her burning.' There were 'merchants of the earth' who began to wonder whether it were well to be too hard on the good customer that had been and the better customer that might still be. Merchants are in truth in a terrible position when 'no man buyeth their merchandise any more.' It would not be exact to say that 'every ship-master, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, cast dust on their heads and cried in modern equivalents: 'Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness.' For the moment the sailors and ship-masters at least were scarcely disposed to mourn a most cruel enemy. But it is broadly true that the interests took automatically a different view from the populace. While to the common man Babylon was merely a hateful thing cast down, there were very powerful people whose main desire was to wax rich once more, if not through 'the abundance of her delicacies,' at least through the preservation of her industrial capacities.

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* The *Evening Standard.*

Such men welcomed a declaration made by Lord Milner some little time before the Armistice. He had remarked* that it would be a 'serious mistake' to imagine the German people were in love with militarism, and had insisted, with great emphasis, on the necessity of maintaining 'stable German Government.' The fear of German Bolshevism had put all fear of a revived Prussian imperialism out of Lord Milner's mind. No other Minister pursued quite this line of argument, but the emphasis laid on the 'perfect fairness' of the contemplated peace, together with the refusal of an important member of the Government 'to state in public what line a British delegate is going to take in regard to any particular question,'† led to a vague uneasiness. 'There is too much suspicion,' said *The Times*, 'of influences concerned to let the Germans off lightly.' 'Suspicion' was too definite a description of the feeling which found noisy expression at every meeting. The public merely wanted to impress a statesman known to be rather specially sensitive to atmosphere with the fact that it did not consider the German case one for chivalry.

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* In an interview published by the *Evening Standard*.

† Mr. Bonar Law, Glasgow, November 24th.

Ministers, however, were rather absurdly responsive to the popular mood. Indeed, their invertebracy on the question of 'making Germany pay' and 'hanging the Kaiser' was only part of their general fear lest anything should endanger their return in triumph; history has surely no parallel to the unnecessary prodigality of promises at this election. Mr. George for some time declined to be bound, but, at last, at Bristol on December 11th, he definitely bent his head to a storm which was after all little more formidable than stage thunder and lightning.

> 'Who (he asked) is to foot the bill? . . . By the jurisprudence of any civilised country in any lawsuit the loser pays. It is not a question of vengeance; it is a question of justice. . . . There is another reason why Germany should pay the bill, apart from the general principles of equity. The war has cost her less than it has cost us. . . . It is absolutely indefensible that a person who is in the wrong should pay less than the person who was declared to be in the right and who has won. . . . I have always said we will exact the last penny we can out of Germany up to the limit of her capacity, but I am not going to mislead the public on the question of her capacity until I know more about it, and I am not going to do it in order to win votes. . . . With regard to the Kaiser, there is absolutely no doubt that he has committed a crime against national right. There is absolutely no doubt that he ought to be held responsible for it. As far as the European Allies are concerned, and I hope America will take the same view, there is no doubt at all as to the demand which will be put forward on the part of the European

> Allies to make the Kaiser and his accomplices responsible for this terrible crime.'

When the votes were counted it was at once apparent that the Government might have dispensed with its elaborate 'coupon' precautions and its profuse pledges. The election with its sweeping majorities for the Coalition was a great personal triumph for Mr. George, and the fate which overtook every prominent Liberal who had voted against the Government over the Maurice affair had a significance not to be ignored. In fact, so far as the immediate issue was concerned, there could be, coupon or no coupon, only one verdict on the part of the nation. On the one side was the great fact that the Government had been strong enough to win the war, and must be made strong enough to make the peace. On the other side there was, properly, nothing, not even a negative. Mr. Asquith's followers could not say that they did not want a strong peace; they did not dare to define a 'clean' peace in a sense opposed to the popular feeling of the moment. Their defeat, indeed, was almost as inglorious as it was complete, and many sought to curry favour by laudations of the Prime Minister, and promises of a general support of his policy, at the very moment that they were appealing for votes against him.

The Labour Party was almost equally at a disadvantage. The minority which was suspected of an anti-national attitude fell before the full fury of popular sentiment. The patriotic majority might suspect the sincerity of the Government's social reform programme, but it could not consistently denounce proposals so frequently put forward from Socialist platforms.

Thus no British party could offer a reasonable opposition, and even Ireland could only oppose two negatives —Ulster saying 'No' to any form of Home Rule, and Sinn Fein to any form of Union. The women voters, who may in future greatly modify the conventional 'swing of the pendulum,' in this case only added their sum of more to that which had too much. In some ways more clear-sighted, and certainly more objectively minded, than the average of the other sex, they are even more prone to hero-worship, and here there was only one obvious hero. It was not true that Mr. George had 'won the war.' The Unknown Warrior, supplied by the Unknown Worker, and paid for by the Unknown Citizen, did that. But in the centre of the lighted stage there was, in the absence of any satisfying naval or military hero, but one figure to catch the eye, and the general election of 1918 was merely the recognition of that fact.

The election has been denounced as an act of political immorality. It was not wicked, but it was injudicious, and it is strange that so clever a man as Mr. George should have been blind to the disadvantages of too big battalions. He could hardly have appealed to the electors to return unpopular candidates, but it would have been good policy on all grounds to make their return as little difficult as the circumstances allowed. As things were, the steps taken to secure a vast majority, and the exaggerated success which attended them, proved a great embarrassment. The pledges concerning the peace-making were not in themselves very important. Germany was to pay 'up to the limit of her capacity.' The Kaiser and the 'war criminals' were to be brought to trial. But Germany's capacity might mean anything, and the Kaiser was in the position of the famous hare; he had first to be caught. In this regard the Prime Minister's hands were really remarkably free. His real trouble was his immense and strangely monotonous following. It was not merely that the great majority of the candidates returned belonged to one political party. More important was the fact that they represented only two or three simple types. There were vast numbers of rather second-rate business men, no doubt shrewd enough in their proper activities, but exceedingly narrow in their conceptions of politics. There were rows and rows of the least engaging representatives of suburban Conservatism. There were, though in rather less force than ordinarily, the solid country gentlemen, the railway directors, the brewers, and the financial magnates. But, by some strange chance, the 'coupon' system seemed to have been fatal to distinction of any kind. Even the lawyers who came back seemed to be the least sprightly of their class, and the general impression of the new House of Commons was that, though it contained much narrow shrewdness, it was exceptionally lacking in intellect or political sense. On the other hand, it was probably the richest House of Commons ever elected.

An assembly so composed was a most unlikely instrument of 'social reform.' But, while scornful of the 'country fit for heroes' schemes, except perhaps as a temporary ruse to side-track Bolshevism, the Coalition majority was, according to its lights, eminently patriotic. It was quite in earnest as to 'making Germany pay,' and almost as ignorant as the economic experts themselves concerning the possibilities of that policy. Mr. George had indeed created a monster that was to haunt and afflict him. Whatever may have been the merits of his reconstruction schemes, the mere fact of such a majority was sufficient to make nonsense of them. However just may have been his ideas of the Peace, he found himself tied, not so much by his actual pledges, as by the sentiments and commitments of his supporters, with their mercantile ideas of economic relations. The election of 1918, disfranchising a great part of the electorate, was, as will be seen, the main cause of all the avoidable misfortunes of the next few years.

CHAPTER XIX

By an unfortunate chance the end of the War found each of the greater Allies under the rule of a one-man Government. Mr. George was master of Britain, M. Clemenceau of France, Mr. Wilson of the United States.

Each of these eminent men had so managed affairs that it was almost impossible to delegate authority. They, and they alone, had all the threads of policy in their hands; they, and they alone, possessed the knowledge, the power, and the prestige to represent their countries. Each in his own way had shown an almost equal intolerance of any kind of rivalry.

M. Clemenceau had perhaps the best excuse; France, when he was called to power, needed a master, and found one in 'The Tiger.' Admirable as a dictator, however, Clemenceau was impossible in the character of colleague, and so long as he retained authority it was over a Cabinet of submissive if talented personal retainers. Mr. George's excuse, though less valid, was not without plausibility. The only possible statesman to take his place at the Conference table was Mr. Balfour, and Mr. Balfour, well advanced in years, had long ceased to be a commanding figure in domestic politics. Mr. Wilson's loneliness was simply determined by his character, and his character was largely determined by his profession. He had governed America much as a schoolmaster governs his school; his peculiar jealousy of all rivalry had deprived him of distinguished assistance from his own party, and it seemed to him as absurd to call the Republican leaders into consultation as it would have been to ask his Princetown students what questions they would like in an examination paper. He had been secluded and aloof throughout the war; he was resolved to be as solitary and despotic in the making of peace.

In all three cases there was a real element of weakness in the apparent self-sufficiency. Clemenceau was sure of his own mind, but could not be sure of his *bloc*.

Mr. George was sure of his *bloc*, but not so sure of his own mind, or of the larger and less articulate public opinion at home. Mr. Wilson began by being sure of everything, and ended by being sure of nothing, except the goodness of his own intentions. Least of all was he sure of America.

Most relevant to the present narrative are the handicaps of the British statesman. For the first time in his life, perhaps, Mr. George felt seriously the want of a 'formal education.' So far it had been on the whole no inconsiderable advantage to him that, without the conventionalising effects of the public school and university, he possessed most of the essential knowledge either could have given him, together with much that could only have been learned in his own very practical academy. But now, in face of the exceedingly complicated problems of the peace, a certain discipline of mind, hardly attainable except in early life, would have been useful to him. Three years at Oxford, moreover, would have put him on his guard against a most dangerous tendency to over-estimate the kind of ability and judgment typified by one who now exerted over him a remarkable influence. We have seen how light a view he had once taken of Lord Milner. In the intimacy of the War Cabinet, however, the unreasonable contempt had given way to a scarcely more reasonable admiration. The consummate artist is often unduly humble in the presence of mere knowledge and accomplishment, and the amplitude of Lord Milner's information, the neatness with which his mind was packed with abstruse facts and familiar theories, greatly impressed Mr. George. It was the sort of reverence young Peter the Great, with his enormous potentialities and actual slovenliness, might have felt for some trim and compact and capable shopkeeping State councillor at Amsterdam. With some academic memories of his own, the Prime Minister would have realised that Lord Milner was merely the highest example of a kind of man who is always graduating from Balliol, winning a good place in the Civil Service, and ending a 'brilliant career' with a knighthood and a pension. It is a type of man nearly always gifted with administrative talents, quick of comprehension, generally dogmatic and self-confident, highly qualified to carry out other people's ideas, but less satisfactory when playing a creative part. Mr. George, who would not have trusted Lord Milner's instincts in war, was disposed to accept him as an authority on the peace, and he went to Paris not only with his Bristol pledges round his neck, but with the much more serious weight of the Milnerian theory that German unity deserved to be, and must be, preserved.

A second handicap was soon to be imposed. On December 13, 1918, President Wilson landed at Brest. An American journalist described his arrival as the 'most momentous experience' of the ancient city 'since Julius Cæsar arrived there, 55 years before the birth of Christ, on his way to add Britain to the Roman Empire.' President Wilson, of somewhat vaguer but more expansive ambition than the Roman, was bent on extending his sway to regions Cæsar never knew. Descending on London on Boxing Day, he conferred with Mr. George at Downing-street, and had little difficulty in persuading him that the League of Nations must be established at the Peace Conference.

The League was far more popular in Great Britain than in the land of its origin, but even among those who were enthusiastic for its inception many, perhaps a majority, believed in making peace first. The problems of peace-making—such was their argument—were highly concrete and brooked no delay. The constitution of the League, on the other hand, was a matter to which too much time and thought could hardly be devoted, and to attempt to rush up so immense an edifice with the speed of a sky-scraper was to risk a rickety peace as well as a jerry-built League.

President Wilson was peremptorily of the contrary opinion. Peace-making and League-making, in his view, must proceed concurrently. Mr. Wilson was a very proud, very stately, very stubborn man, at this time in the full enjoyment of a world-wide moral authority for which history scarcely affords a parallel. He was, moreover, conceived by British statesmen to have behind him the great weight of an almost unanimous American opinion. He had shown himself not unsympathetic, in the matter of 'freedom of the seas,' with Great Britain; he had freely 'conceded' her 'peculiar position as an island Empire,' and after the recognition of this geographical fact Mr. George may well have thought it ungraceful to refuse an equivalent concession.

Thus it was agreed that peace and the League were to be made together; and a temptation to cloudy thinking and indecisive action was automatically introduced into the councils of the victors. For it could always be maintained that if a particular expedient did not work well, or if a given arrangement failed of its purpose, there was the League of Nations duly made and provided to set right such deficiencies. It can never be satisfactory to work simultaneously on the foundations and the roof of a building, but the risks of indifferent results are increased when one does not quite know which is to be foundation and which roof. That was precisely the position with regard to the League of Nations. Either it was the foundation of the whole peace, in which case it should have been constructed first, or it was the completion of the whole peace, in which case it should have been considered last. The procedure in fact adopted spoiled both peace and League.

Mr. George, then, on taking his place at the first plenary session of the Conference on January 18th, 1919, had before him a programme of four points—

(1) Germany must pay for the war to the limit of her capacity.
(2) The Kaiser and his accomplices must be brought to trial.
(3) Germany must not be dismembered.
(4) The League of Nations must be set up concurrently with the Treaty.

The first two commitments arose from Mr. George's election pledges. The third restriction was the product of the Milnerian school of thought, but was also intimately connected with point number one, for it was plain that any diminution of German territory must lessen Germany's capacity to pay. On the other hand, it might be argued that a Germany little reduced in population, and encouraged to grow rich in order that she should pay a heavy fine for her misdeeds, must always be tempted, and would some day have the power, to wage a war of revenge. Such critics could be met by the plausible, if not convincing, reply that with Mr. Wilson's League in being wars were impossible.

There was a fifth point, not less important because it was only implied, in Mr. George's summary of essentials. Throughout the war, he had stood in a quite special sense for the doctrine that no circumstances justified even the temporary abandonment of an Ally. In 1915 he had pleaded for help to Serbia; in 1916 he had demanded help for Rumania, parting with Mr. Asquith because none was sent; in 1917 he had given help in full measure to Italy. It may be confidently assumed that he went to Paris with a full realisation of his obligation to see that France did not suffer through his concern with the other points of his programme.

Unfortunately for these resolutions, however, they were subject to constant erosion in contact with the pledges to extract the uttermost farthing from Germany and with the conviction that the Hohenzollern Empire deserved, as a 'progressive' organisation, quite other measure than that meted out to its unfortunate Hapsburg neighbour. As soon as the question of reparations and indemnities was raised there began a conflict between Mr. George's feelings on the one side and his engagements and obsessions on the other. The representative of Belgium put in a claim for priority in regard to any payments made by Germany. It was, surely, a reasonable claim. French and British statesmen had always agreed in regarding Belgium with a peculiar respect and tenderness, and even most Germans admitted that, whoever might be to blame for the war, Belgium was innocent, and should from some source or other be compensated for the violation of her neutrality. 'Our people have trusted you; do not refuse what they expect,' exclaimed M. Vandervelde. Mr. George, opposing priority, could only reply, 'You have fewer dead than we.'

For other reasons France had special claims. She had suffered more than any of the Western Allies. Her territory had been over-run; her people had been treated with the most savage cruelty; a deliberate attempt had been made to ruin her industrially by the systematic destruction of her chief manufacturing and coal-bearing areas. But Mr. George, with point Number One always before him, was obliged to argue that the French claims were excessive, that the Chemin des Dames would still bring bids if it were put up to auction, and that town-halls, churches and houses had never been so highly valued before the war.

All this, be it understood, was not argument for moderation to a defeated enemy, or in favour of restricting demands to the 'damage' specially indicated in Mr. Wilson's Notes. For Mr. George had already declared that Germany could be properly called on to bear the whole cost of the war, and that she must pay to the limit of her capacity. He seems, moreover, to have been convinced in these early days that an almost unlimited tribute could be forced from the enemy if, in the words of Sir Eric Geddes, she were 'squeezed till the pips squeaked.' What hesitations he still had at Bristol were dissipated by the report of the Special Commission appointed by the Supreme Council to ascertain Germany's liabilities and her capacity to meet them. The bill presented by the Commission covered the cost of the war as well as damage to citizens' property, and its total was a present value of a thousand thousand million francs, or three times that amount if payments were spread over fifty years.

Mr. George seems to have fallen to the magic of this gigantic figure without going into the question of how it could be collected. The British representative on the Commission which framed the bill was Mr. W. M. Hughes, of Australia, whom a French colleague* describes as 'a little deaf man, impetuous, clear-headed, blunt and aggressive as an orator.' Mr. Hughes had from the first protested against any limitation of the Allies' claims in the sense of President Wilson's pre-Armistice Notes, and had declared that he did not consider himself bound by them. It was not wonderful

* M. André Tardieu.

that he should take this view. Under the one interpretation of 'damage' France would get much, and Belgium a good deal, the British Empire as a whole would have a considerable claim for submarine damage, but Australia would receive scarcely anything. Mr. George had, therefore, not only to consider his own House of Commons majority; he was also under a necessity of seeing that Mr. Hughes, who had spoken so loudly, did not look ridiculous in the eyes of Australia.

Thus, while President Wilson protested against the extension of 'damage' to cover the costs of the war, and while the French and Belgians suggested concentration on 'reparations' and payment for war pensions, Messrs. George and Hughes were for sending in a bill for the entire war costs—a fact which should have been remembered at a later period, when France was habitually represented as a vindictive and irrational creditor. Ultimately Mr. George abandoned his extreme position, but with some nervousness. 'Our public,' he said, 'requires reparation to be as complete as possible,' and he insisted that, since the whole expenses of the war could not be recovered, clauses should be inserted in the Treaty to the effect that if they were not exacted it was not because it would be unjust to claim them, but because payment in full was an impossibility. M. Clemenceau, the remorseless realist, remarked that all this was 'a question of wording.' But as one who knew the troubles of a Parliamentary statesman, he had no objection whatever to Mr. George putting himself right with critical supporters.

This dispute over money exactions hardly showed Mr. George at his happiest, and he was doubtless uneasily conscious of the fact. He was revealed neither as a statesman clearly distinguishing between mirage and fact, nor as an idealist to whom moral values are paramount, but rather as one of his own business men flustered by something out of the ordinary routine. Possibly a feeling that he had not figured to advantage helped the spell cast over him by Lord Milner, and made him, in his dealings with Germany, a kind of inverted Shylock, eager for cash, but resolute against any operation on the body of the defendant.

Alsace-Lorraine, of course, had to be restored. But to the claims of Poland Mr. George was notably unsympathetic. As a Nonconformist Radical he could hardly feel any great love for a landlord-ridden country more stubborn in its attachment to the Roman Catholic faith than any other part of Europe save Ireland. But he seems also to have been prejudiced against the Poles as a poor business race. In the matter of the Danzig corridor he sided with Germany against the Poles and President Wilson. In the matter of Silesia, he sided with Germany against the Poles and the French. 'You cannot,' he is reported as saying,* 'place millions of Germans, who, whatever their faults, are a very advanced people, under the domination of the Poles, who are far less civilised.'

It was precisely the same sort of argument that the pan-Germans had used for thirty years before to justify the great plans of absorption which the war nearly carried to success. Mr. George, however, was conscious of no inconsistency. While the sentimental side of him is open to the appeal of the little people rightly struggling to be free, his practical side is but too apt to accept a purely material test of civilisation; and if it were a question between Poles being under Germans or Germans under Poles, the reflection that Poland had no Krupp or Vulcan was bound to be decisive. Who, indeed, of us can cast a stone? In British eyes the Irish tangle has constantly been prejudged by the fact that Belfast has much machinery and that Waterford has little.

On the subject of the Western frontier Mr. George was equally wedded to the view that German territory must be left substantially intact, first because there must be no 'new Alsace-Lorraines,' secondly because Germany could not pay a great money indemnity if her area were sensibly diminished. Here there was a sharp conflict with French opinion. The difference of view was natural enough. To Great Britain the German menace was naval, and it seemed to have disappeared with the surrender of the High Sea Fleet. To France it was military, and every Frenchman knew, if only from memories of his own nation's recovery from great

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* Mr. Sisley Huddleston.

Mr. Lloyd George during his Highland holiday in the Autumn of 1921.

The Duke of Atholl is leading his pony.

disasters in the field, how transient may be the effects of unimproved victory. France was less impressed than England by the flight of the Hohenzollerns; their Empire remained, its inspiring ideas remained, and with little diminution in size and population it must become again formidable within a very few years. Therefore, some great and permanent subtraction must be made from the strength of Prussianised Germany. This was not merely the view of Chauvinists. M. Yves Guyot, favourable as a Free Trader to the least possible hindrance of commercial relations with the German peoples, was not less insistent than Nationalists of the type of M. Maurice Barrès and M. Maurras. To the ordinary Frenchman, in short, the necessity of dismembering the Empire created in 1871 was axiomatic, and to M. Clemenceau, as to Marshal Foch, it seemed that as a minimum of security the left bank of the Rhine should be in some way detached from Prussia, preferably by conversion into an autonomous buffer State.

Mr. George was stubbornly opposed to any such project. His first impression of Paris had been the Strasbourg statue draped in black, and he was resolved that Germany should have no pretext to maintain a similar memorial, mourning a national humiliation and prompting a national revenge. It was useless to argue that the Rhineland, with its Roman tradition, had little in common with the newer civilisation beyond, and least of all with the *kultur* of Pomerania and Brandenburg. President Wilson, tender as was his conscience on the question of nationalities, does not seem to have been at first outraged by the French proposal. But Mr. George was adamant in opposition. Many forces were pulling him in the same direction. There was his own sincere sentiment. There was the fact that if five million Germans were detached from the Empire there would be five millions fewer to work for the fulfilment of the Bristol pledges. There was the fact that Lord Milner, with his Balliol infallibility, had predicted dreadful things in Berlin if the German Empire were not kept together.* And, not least decisive, there was General Smuts.

* A remarkable utterance by Lord Milner on the subject appeared in the *Evening Standard* of London shortly before the Armistice.

The General had played an honourable and splendid part in the war, he had afterwards proved himself a wise counsellor, and when he spoke at the Conference in his capacity of South African representative he was merely a steady-going delegate trying to get the best for his country in the matters of indemnities and mandated territories. But when he touched European affairs the statesman was swallowed up in the idealogue. Smuts believed quite honestly that all virtue resided with the 'Teutonic' race, and that Germans, if erring brethren, were still brethren. Mr. George, as a Celt, was free from this racial prejudice, but with his mind always open on questions of detail—including very big details—he was peculiarly susceptible to the influence of the last speaker, and from a talk with General Smuts he would go to a meeting of the 'Big Four' with proposals which made M. Clemenceau wonder (sometimes aloud) whether the Allies were to ask Germany's pardon for having taken the liberty of beating her.

M. André Tardieu says :—*

> 'Those who knew how to talk to the British Prime Minister could always bring him back to fundamental principles. The infinite sensitiveness of his mind, his passionate love of success, led him to improvise arguments which did not always bear examination, or were too exclusively pro-British. But when a man who enjoyed his respect answered the bold suggestions of his quick brain with those permanent truths he had momentarily deserted, he came back to them when the time arrived for final discussion.'

The urbanity of this criticism does not altogether obscure its point. In face of the comparatively simple questions of the war, Mr. George's intense energy and conviction preserved him from all but the minimum of vacillation. But here, surrounded by every kind of complexity, continually encountering facts and theories of which he had scarcely heard, he was a harp on which many hands could play many tunes. It must be allowed that where the more obvious British interests were concerned he was a faithful and vigilant steward, and perhaps even erred in his anxiety for the aggrandisement of the British Empire. His appetite for 'mandates' was scarcely less notable than his desire for a great money indemnity. But in those great questions on which Great Britain was less directly (though perhaps at bottom more vitally) concerned, his interest was small, and his liability to influence correspondingly great. M. Clemenceau might, no doubt, bring him back to one 'fundamental principle,' that of the Alliance, which was to make Germany impotent for harm. But there were other 'fundamental principles'—those of President Wilson, Lord Milner, General Smuts, and the Labour leaders who so often breakfasted with him—and to these very different fundamental principles he was also 'brought back.'

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* The 'Truth about the Treaty' (English Translation).

Hence it was never easy to predict on which side of a fence he would descend, still less easy to feel assured that, having leaped, he would not leap back again. Occasionally M. Clemenceau, for whom he felt respect and perhaps a little awe, prevailed over all other influences. Thus in the matter of the Saar Valley Mr. George stood by France in resistance to President Wilson and in defiance of pressure from home. Capital and Labour in the British coalfields, and especially in South Wales, were united in opposition to the proposal that France, instead of importing coal at fancy prices, should be given in the Saar mines some compensation for the loss of her own collieries, war-wasted or deliberately destroyed. Mr. Wilson, on his side, strongly opposed on the grounds that the population of the Saar Valley was almost purely Teutonic, that the district had always been politically German, and that its transference would be a violation of the principle of self-determination. None of these arguments had weight with Mr. George. On the one side his most generous sentiments were affronted by the unsightly spectacle of the British coal trade not only squeezing the uttermost shilling out of an Ally's present necessities, but praying that those necessities should be perpetuated. On the other side, he would recognise no political hardship, and even went so far as to declare that 'if in a few years a plebiscite takes place, the people will not ask again to belong to Germany.'

On this last point he was probably unaware of inconsistency. Plainly the arguments which he used against the detachment of the left bank of the Rhine, and the establishment of an autonomous Government, applied with still greater force to the proposal to place under alien administration a rather exceptionally homogeneous German population. Plainly, also, there was no more reason to expect that the Saar Valley inhabitants would become reconciled to their fate than there was to suppose that the Rhine provinces might find content in separation from Prussia. The truth seems to be that Mr. George reasoned like Marryat's servant girl. If the alienation of the Saar were indeed a sin, it was 'only a little one.'

Towards the end of March Mr. George suffered a sharp attack of 'nerves.' Under the direction of one Bela Cohen a Bolshevik Government had been proclaimed in Hungary.* That a Jewish dictator would enjoy no enduring dominion in a land of Catholic peasants it needed no great insight to foresee. But to Mr. George the rise of Cohen was a portent. Lord Milner, then, was right. Bolshevism was coming westward. A little more delay in settlement, a little more pressure on Germany, and Berlin might go the way of Buda-Pesth. From Germany the plague would infect France and Italy, and then—'if they once may win the bridge, what hope to save the town?' The Prime Minister's lively imagination tortured him with visions of terrible things happening in solid England—a Cockney Lenin at Downing-street, perhaps a yokel Trotsky at the War Office, Manchester and Leeds and Criccieth in the grip of bloodthirsty Commissars. This profound impression made by the Hungarian Sovietists was not without a considerable reaction on British domestic policy. On the course of the Peace Conference its effect was immediately important. 'They will not sign' was thenceforth the Prime Minister's ordinary form of remonstrance. On March 26th he wrote a Note

* On March 21st.

insisting on the dangers of a 'punitive peace,' and declaring that no attempt must be made to separate the Rhine provinces from the rest of Germany.

About the same time there appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* an interview with a 'high authority' who had expressed 'moderate' views of a similar tenor. 'You cannot go on stripping Germany bare,' said this influential personage. 'If,' he persisted, 'we give Germany a deadly wound there (on the Polish frontier) goodbye to the prospects of permanent peace.' The thing was in substance such a declaration as might have come from almost any representative of that school of thought which maintained that the cunning piece of carpentry known as the German Empire should be held sacred in a sense refused to the much more historic Hapsburg Monarchy. In manner, however, the interview strongly suggested the Prime Minister.

'Think,' said the high authority, 'of the gigantic and complicated problems which we have to unravel. It is not only their magnitude, but their variety. I confess I was ignorant of the very existence of some of the places now hotly disputed, and upon which the issue of peace and war depends. Every tiny piece of land which is in discussion is a possible battleground which may grow into a battleground as big as Europe.'

Mr. George has a disarming way of confessing his minor limitations—about this time he declared almost boastfully that he had never 'heard of Teschen'—and the admission of geographical bafflement was generally regarded as conclusive proof of the identity of the 'high authority.' Consternation prevailed at Westminster, and on behalf of 370 members of Parliament Colonel Claude Lowther telegraphed to the Prime Minister that Germany must be 'made to pay,' This alarm infected the general public; French opinion was greatly moved; and at the beginning of April Mr. George found it necessary to assure a French paper* that the best feeling prevailed in the Conference Chamber, and that 'differences were being adjusted.' In fact, there was chaos. The French were pressing for a Rhine settlement. Mr. George was opposing the cession of the 'corridor' to

* *Le Matin.*

Poland. Signor Orlando had threatened to withdraw because a Serbian delegate had been invited to give his views on the Adriatic. President Wilson, after ordering the *George Washington* for his homeward voyage, had retired to bed, and Mr. Lansing declared that such horizontal attitude 'justified speculation as to its meaning.' Colonel House, at once more outspoken and more obscure, characterised the Italian trouble as 'pure bunk.'

Such was the troubled scene which Mr. George quitted for Westminster in order to explain his activities to the faithful but disquieted Commons. He had no difficulty in scoring a great Parliamentary triumph, and perhaps never before or since has he shown equal adroitness in avoiding the main issue. Like the youthful barrister of Gilbert—

His argument was novel;
For a verdict he relied
On blackening the junior
Upon the other side.

With some audacity he laid on the late Lord Northcliffe (who had never owned or controlled the *Westminster Gazette*) the whole responsibility for the commotion caused by the statement of the 'high authority.' From his speech a thoughtful reader might almost have inferred that the former journalistic ally, now converted into a bitter critic, had been the prime mover in a plot to ruin Mr. George by imputing to him a pro-German policy. But in fact the reader was not given the chance to infer anything, because he was not given the chance to think. He was simply carried away by the impetuous rush of brilliant irrelevancy. He was moved to respect by Mr. George's picture of the negotiators—their goodness, their patience, their harmony, the purity of their hearts, the clarity of their understandings. He was moved to pity by the unmerited tribulations of these just men at the hands of the peace-breakers—'stones clattering through the roof, and crashing through the windows, and sometimes wild men screaming through the key-holes.' He was moved to suspicion by a suggestion of motive, and to laughter by a bold simile—

Lord Northcliffe was actually compared to a 'grasshopper.' The effect of all this wit, pathos and severity was decisive. Without saying anything that was really to the point, Mr. George returned to Paris with the pleasing consciousness that he had now nothing to fear but Bolshevism and Germany's refusal to sign.

In the end, says M. Tardieu, he suggested 'unthinkable concessions on almost every point.' But meanwhile a sort of settlement had been reached on certain vital matters. There was a lengthy conference, without Secretaries or interpreters, between President Wilson, M. Clemenceau, and Mr. George, on the question which was to France important above all others—that of securing herself against a revived and revengeful Germany. The English-speaking statesmen would not accept the Rhine project in any form; M. Clemenceau firmly declined various counter-proposals. At last the British and American representatives put forward a really seductive proposal. France was offered the guarantee of an alliance—both Powers binding themselves to resist any 'unprovoked attack' on Germany's part—if she would forgo the occupation of the Rhine bridge-heads and the plan for a separate Rhenish State.

M. Clemenceau, though attracted, trod warily. The British offer was good enough, for Mr. George had a sure Parliamentary majority, and the only trouble was that there must always be a certain time during which France would have single-handed to defend a poor strategic frontier. But what about President Wilson's authority to pledge his country? To suggest mistrust was to offend a very sensitive pride; to accept without question was to pay the price of a great something for possibly less than nothing. M. Clemenceau, after a month of dexterous manœuvring, won the President to the view that France needed something more. Occupation of the left bank for a period of fifteen years was finally authorised, and evacuation even at the end of this time was made dependent on the sufficiency of other guarantees against German aggression. This was Clemenceau's master-stroke. Guessing, correctly, as the event proved, that the President's undertaking would not be accepted by the United States, that with this refusal the British undertaking would become of no binding effect, he looked forward to the time when France might have to fight again for her life, and fight alone. If so, he was resolved that the battle should be on German soil. The Alliance might fail to realise itself, but the watch on the Rhine would be still a solid fact.

Mr. George fought his hardest against the occupation clauses. Occupation, he argued, was both unjust and unnecessary; it would absorb the indemnities, and would infallibly in time rouse sympathy for Germany in Great Britain and America. But M. Clemenceau, now supported by President Wilson, had his way, and in June Germany was informed that such guarantees were needful because the contracting parties included those 'whose promises have proved unworthy of our faith.' So ended a long and bitter struggle. The result was far from satisfactory. It permitted in Great Britain of the legend of a vindictive, militaristic, and overweening France, intolerable in the day of her triumph as she had ever been under Louis the Great or Napoleon. It allowed the equally unjustified feeling to gain strength in France that Great Britain cherished a secret hostility to her Ally and a secret tenderness for her enemy. It left the problem of the Rhine unsettled, and held, as Mr. George quite justly foresaw, the germs of much future trouble.

Whatever the crimes of Germany, it was not pleasant for any European to contemplate an extended military occupation of her most highly civilised provinces by Senegalese and Moroccans; if such a humiliation were justified at all, it would have been more appropriately inflicted on the home of the chief plotters of the war than on the pleasant cities and gracious lands of the Rhine. Add that a standing obstacle was created to general disarmament, and the arrangement can command only an exceedingly qualified approval. Nevertheless, the French cannot be justly blamed for their insistence on a safeguard, even though we may regard the particular form of safeguard as involving great evils. They, at least, could not afford to nourish illusions. M. Clemenceau has been severely handled by British idealists for envisaging European history as 'a perpetual prize fight, of which France has won this round, but of which this round is certainly not the last.'* But, after all, it was natural—natural, too, that he should believe the German 'without generosity or remorse in negotiation'—in view of the things he had seen, and the transactions in which he had been involved, in the course of over half a century's public life. He had personally taken part in resistance to a successful attempt to dismember, and an almost successful attempt to destroy, his own country. Now, in the moment of victory, he heard on all sides vague talk of securing universal peace, but nowhere a definite plan for avoiding even one war. Is it wonderful, on the whole, that 'his philosophy had no room for sentimentality,' and that his philosophy was shared by nearly all Frenchmen?

Whatever else might be said of M. Clemenceau, he had, like the Biglow hero, a 'middling tight grip of the handful of things that he knew.' Mr. George's grip, except as regarded purely British interests, was intermittent. His treatment of the Russian question, as that of others, was determined mainly by changes in his moods and his counsellors. At first he joined President Wilson in advocating a conference at which all the Russian parties, including the Bolsheviks, should be represented. 'The Bolsheviks,' he said, 'were the very people some of them wished to hear.' But nothing came of the project. The Bolsheviks continued fighting despite the appeals that they should engage in conversations at Prince's Island. The other Russian parties frankly declined to meet them; and in course of time Mr. George, under Mr. Churchill's influence, changed his mind. But his mind was never quite made up. Mr. Churchill might persuade him to lavish millions in helping Koltchak, Denikin, and other anti-Bolshevik leaders. But at long last somebody or something else decided him to abandon each in turn.

The history of the Turkish negotiations reveals a similar want of decision. In the beginning Mr. George preached the old Radical doctrine that the Turk must not be permitted to rule any Christian population, and in this view he was, of course, supported by M. Venizelos, the very able representative of Greece, and by Sir Basil Zaharoff and other wealthy men of Hellenic extraction or sympathies. Resentment of Young Turk treachery had revived the sentiment of 'bag and baggage,' and for a few months Mr. George was imagined as translating Gladstonian rhetoric into action. In the Cabinet, however, there was a minor but quite effective Disraeli in the person of Mr. Montagu, and in the end the Turk was maintained on the banks of the Bosphorus.

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* Mr. J. M. Keynes, 'The Economic Consequences of the Peace.'

Indeed, of all the leading figures at the Conference, Mr. George was the one who least knew, as regarded the more general issues, exactly what he wanted. President Wilson wanted the millenium, and might at least have got the League of Nations if he could have induced his countrymen to accept it. M. Clemenceau wanted above all security for France, after that compensation for France. The aims of Signor Orlando, of M. Venizelos, of M. Passitch, even of the Emir Feisul were intelligible enough. But Mr. George never quite succeeded in fixing in his mind what he did want; he sometimes failed even to fix in other people's minds what he did not want. After February he almost forgot to demand the Kaiser's head. For some time longer he wanted, probably, to 'make Germany pay.' But in the end he seems to have been chiefly anxious to make Germany sign. By the summer of 1919 the statesman who had fared so gaily to France, with high hopes of a peace at once sternly just and benignly healing, was a weary and disillusioned man, mainly anxious to be back to Downing Street and Walton Heath.

But there were moments when the spirit of the great war Minister, depressed by that hot and mephitic atmosphere, still responded nobly to stimulus. Such a moment came on the afternoon of May 7, when, at a Plenary Session of the Conference, the Draft Peace Treaty was handed to the Germans by M. Clemenceau. Brockdorff-Rantzau, 'draped in brutish insolence,' replied, without rising to his feet, that Germany had not alone been responsible for the war, and that the Allied terms were dictated by hatred and revenge. It is said that Mr. Balfour yawned. Mr. George, less of a philosopher, felt the blood run hot to his forehead. 'It is hard,' he said to a French delegate, 'to have won the war and to have to listen to that.' Perhaps the great mistake of the Conference, perhaps the great misfortune of the Prime Minister, was that the Germans were excluded from it. For, with all his sensitiveness to plausible suggestion, with all his love of the sounding phrase and the satisfying formula, Mr. George is emphatically a man, with real blood and sinew. If he can be sometimes bemused he can never be safely defied; and there is withal in him a certain realism which on due occasion clears away all the mists of cant and hearsay that are apt to gather round him. Weekly doses of Prussianism in the concrete would have been a sovereign specific for the Prime Minister's chief troubles. Unfortunately, Brockdorff-Rantzau arrived too late. Mr. George might flame momentarily into an indignation that became him. But he was already committed to a peace which gave Germany every incentive to a war of revenge, while failing to deprive her of the means of waging it—a peace which laid on her a financial obligation impossible to meet, unless she were to be nursed back to a power and prosperity which would enable her to defy her creditors.

Such in broad outline were the concrete achievements of Mr. George as Peace Plenipotentiary. So dry a summary, taken by itself, might suggest that he produced on his colleagues and subordinates an impression disastrously unequal to his great reputation. The exact opposite is the fact. The power and charm of his personality were never more potent than during these months. At no time were more signally illustrated his dexterity in devising expedients, his fertility in suggestions of compromise, his nimbleness of wit, his amazing capacity of catching at once the superficial tone of any society, however unfamiliar, or the superficial drift of any question, however obscure. Never had he exercised more brilliantly those rather dangerous faculties of 'building flying bridges between incompatibles.'

An acute but hardly sympathetic critic* has described him as 'watching the company with six or seven senses not available to ordinary men, judging character, motive, and sub-conscious impulse, perceiving what each was thinking, and even what each was going to say next, and compounding with telepathic instinct the argument or appeal best suited to the vanity, weakness, or self-interest of his immediate auditor.'

To the cynical philosophy of Clemenceau and the idealism of Wilson, he could oppose but little in the way of consecutive thought; his broader policy was a thing of shreds and patches, a curious compound to the making of which his own 'noble sentiment,' shrewd instinct for the average man's view, and occasional statesmanlike inspirations contributed equally with ideas borrowed from whomever might have his ear at the moment. But if Clemenceau might sometimes make grim jests concerning his lack of information† on questions which arose suddenly, without giving him an opportunity to prime himself, even that grim old warrior was forced to respect the unerring accuracy with which he found the weak joints in an adversary's harness.

Not less remarkable was the manner in which he precisely fitted the argument to the man, and the *botte* to the fencer. In dealing with Mr. Wilson he would first, in all meekness and innocence, demolish while applauding the moral foundation of the President's position; then, with wonderful address, he would suggest another foundation just as good, and apparently but a mere trifle different. With Clemenceau, on the other hand, he would adopt rather the good-humoured air of Mr. Bucket—the style of, 'You know me and I know you; you're a man of the world, you know, and a man of business, and a man of sense; that's what *you* are.' In the quick rapier play of debate he had no equal; in smoothing over differences between other parties his skill was incomparable; and he established a personal ascendancy over the Conference scarcely inferior to that which he enjoyed among his fellow-statesmen at home. Mr. Tardieu, writing from memory of many heated debates behind the scenes, says :—*

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* Mr. J. M. Keynes, 'The Economic Consequences of the Peace.'

† 'Mr. George,' said another Frenchman, 'can certainly read, but has he ever read anything?' This, of course, must be accepted as the joke it was meant to be. Mr. George is a great reader, or perhaps rather a great skimmer. He browses rather than studies.

> 'Mr. Lloyd George argued like a sharp-shooter, with sudden bursts of cordial approval and equally frequent gusts of anger, with wealth of brilliant imagination and copious historical reminiscences. Clasping his knees in his hands, he would sit by the fire-place, utterly indifferent to technical argument, irresistibly attracted to unexpected solutions, dazzling with eloquence and wit, but moved solely by high appeals to permanent bonds of friendship, and always fearful of Parliamentary consequences.'

We have here the man in all his strength and weakness as he showed himself in those critical days—a man not genuinely statesmanlike in habit or temper, but capable of flashes of true inspiration, impatient of detail, almost morbidly fertile in expedient, scornful of precedent, loving novelty for its own sake, prone to treat illustrations as logical analogies, sensitive to sentimental appeal, a supreme political gladiator, and a very human person. M. Tardieu is no doubt representative of Mr. George's foreign colleagues. He is not intellectually dominated by the statesman. But he makes it very clear that he was not proof against the fascination of the man.

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* 'The Truth about the Treaty' (English Translation).

CHAPTER XX

For his 'pre-eminent services' in war-making and peace-making Mr. George received from the King the Order of Merit. It is understood that he had previously refused what Melbourne distinguished as the Order of 'No Damned Merit'—the Garter. Mr. George, democrat as he is, no more objects to titles than a magistrate objects to imprisonment—for other people, particularly people whom it is desirable to put out of the way. His personal preference is to remain David Lloyd George.

In any case no honour could rival that of the popular welcome he received in London on his return from Paris, and no pleasure that of his triumphal visit to the little town of Criccieth, where he had set up in practice thirty years before, with enough capital to buy a brass plate and too little to buy a stuff gown. Small wonder if, in recalling the wonderful series of chances which had brought him from the defence of small game thieves and trespassers to the prosecution of the greatest poacher and remover of landmarks the world has known, he should feel himself literally the agent of Providence. Time and again during those thirty years it had seemed impossible that the frail bark of his fortune should escape wreck. Often it had appeared doubtful whether the mere pressure of vulgar impecuniosity would not crush him. Even six years before, a certain cloud hung over him; if he had not exactly failed his success was of a dubious kind. Now the 'little Welsh solicitor,' the 'cad of the Cabinet,' 'half pantaloon and half highwayman,' was beyond doubt the most powerful and conspicuous personage in the British Empire, perhaps the most powerful and conspicuous personage in the world. Those who had most meanly reviled his origin, those who had assailed him with the coarsest invective, those who had denounced him as the most dangerous and jeered at him as the most flimsy of demagogues, were now either his closest colleagues or his meekest sycophants, fawned on him for the crumbs he could throw them, or revelled in the less comprehensible ecstacy of disinterested self-abasement.

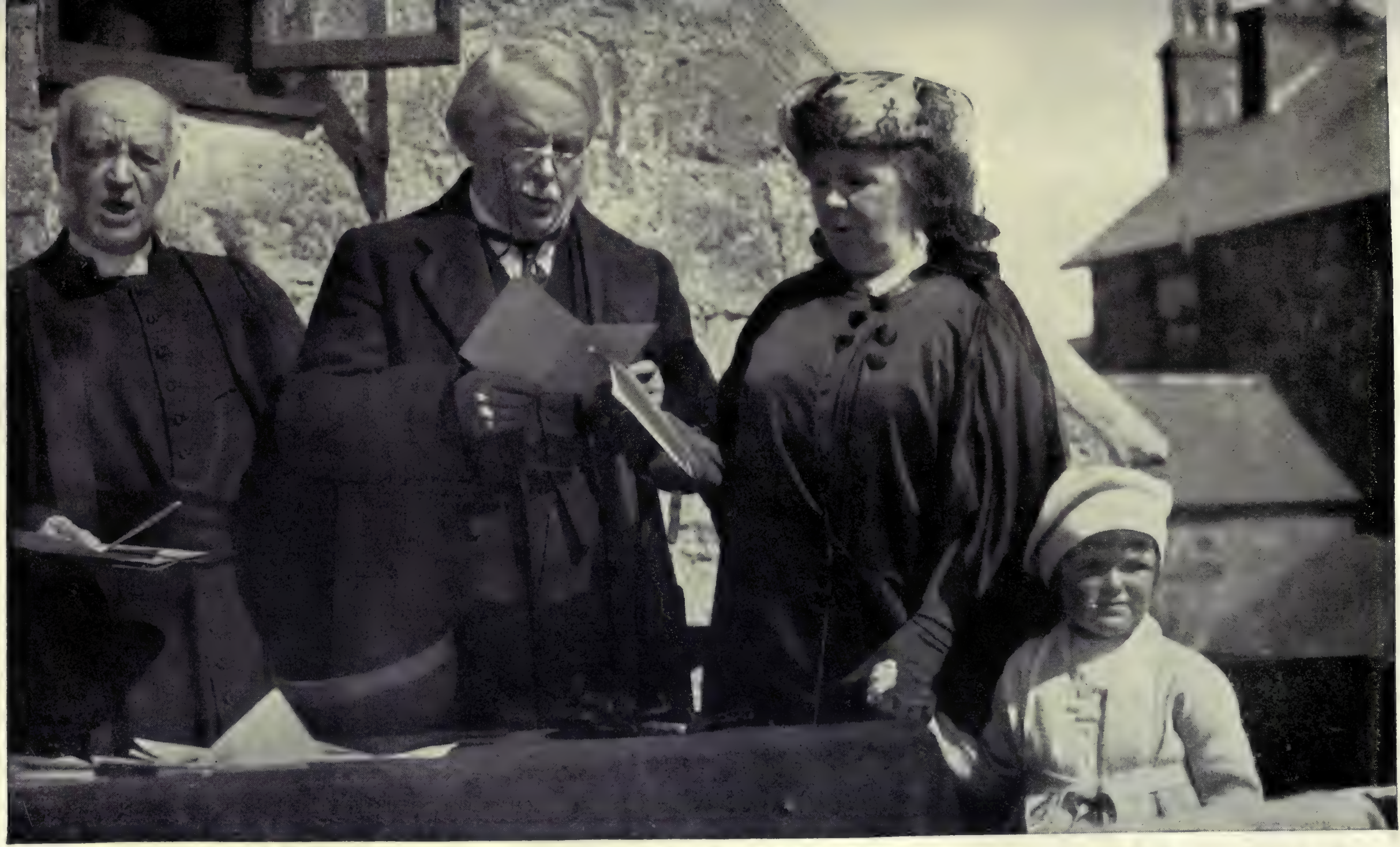
Like every successful man, Mr. George must have mingled contempt with satisfaction in hearing the Parliamentary Hosannahs which might, at the first great change of fortune, be converted into cries of 'Send him to the House of Lords.' But here in Criccieth he was among friends, people who had stood by him through fair weather and foul, whose sympathy had heartened him in many a dark hour, and whom, be it said to his credit, he had never neglected and under-valued in the days of his greatness. One thing, indeed, was wanting to complete the joy of the visit. Mr. George's second father, the shoemaker of Llanystumdwy, was some two years dead, and the thought that Richard Lloyd had not survived to see the apotheosis of his ward must have been a sharp reminder of the hollowness of fame. The Prime Minister would probably have exchanged much emission of public breath for a touch of that vanished hand.

For a time Britain was little more critical of the Treaty than Criccieth. The mere fact of peace was a relief, and few were inclined to unfriendly scrutiny of the Prime Minister's sheaves. He was recognised as a national hero, and the German indemnity as a national asset. The circumstances, however, were such as to make reaction inevitable, and it came quickly with the realisation that there are practical discomforts attached to living on a 'pinnacle of glory.' One is there exposed to the worst the East wind can do, and the food supply is liable to interruption. The British people soon found the draught and the pinch; and no enlargements on the moral splendours of their situation could reconcile them to its very obvious physical discomforts.

The success, so unhappily complete, of the election of 1918, now added to the Prime Minister's embarrassments. In his haste to make sure of a great majority Mr. George had either forgotten the desirability of having a strong party of his own, or had been outwitted by the Conservative organiser, Sir George Younger, a Scot, a brewer, an exceedingly enthusiastic Tory, and an adroit electioneer. Sir George had come to the conclusion that Conservatism must supply the body, and Coalition Liberalism only the flavouring, of his political brew; it therefore followed, by all rules of the mash-tub, that the hops must bear but an insignificant proportion to the malt. As it happened the hops, being of rather inferior quality, did not even count largely as flavouring. In other words, while the Coalition Liberals were a decidedly small minority in the whole Coalition, there was no quality to compensate for their numerical inferiority. The Asquithian Liberals, who might have been a balancing force, had almost disappeared, and Labour, by the chance that nearly all its intellectuals had been rejected on suspicion of 'pro-Germanism,' was represented only by a rather sulky and undistinguished deputation of trade union delegates.

In short, the House in no sense represented the country, except on the issues of hanging the Kaiser and making Germany pay. Accordingly, when those questions were finished with, a large part of the electorate felt itself tricked, and, being debarred from constitutional means of making its resentment known, became attracted to what was virtually a policy of blackmail. On its side the Government, deprived of the moral strength which springs from the support of great popular forces, deprived also of means of judging the true value of popular forces in opposition, was inclined to believe every local riot a portent of revolution, every foolish speech a call to Bolshevism, every strike an evidence of widespread conspiracy to overthrow the social order. Paying liberally for evidence in support of its fears, it found naturally that the supply responded to the demand. Hence Ministers in general, and the Prime Minister in particular, were betrayed into a mixture of truculence, suspicion and compliance which was precisely calculated to manufacture the evils most feared.

An astonished Britain heard that it was the Government's duty and intention to 'fight Prussianism in the industrial field as we fought it on the Continent of Europe.' An astonished London saw ugly wooden barricades rising at the entrances to Downing Street. An astonished (and most irritated) taxpayer saw millions devoted, on the one hand, to preparations to meet



Mr. Lloyd George, Dame Lloyd George, and their grandchild at the laying of the foundation stone of the War Memorial Hall at Criccieth (June, 1922).

rebellion, and on the other to the buying off of alleged contingent rebels. The Government not only yielded to existing blackmailers. It created them in millions. Every threat, every accusation, produced more working-class anger; every ebullition of working-class anger increased the nervousness of the Government; every fresh access of nervousness led to new class bribes, and every new class bribe produced, as usual, 'one ingrate and ten malcontents.'

The evil appeared in the very first days of the new Parliament. The Army, so long held up as an example of cheery content and good-will, was impatient to get out of khaki. There were processions of soldiers to the War Office, disorders in provincial camps, grave breaches of discipline in France. The Government dealt with the situation in the way which was to become so characteristic of its handling of labour difficulties. The soldiers were told to be reasonable—they could not all expect to return to civil life at once. But meanwhile their pay would be increased. In other words they were bribed to keep quiet.

Industrial difficulties swiftly followed. There was trouble on the Yorkshire coal-fields, on the Clyde, among the London electricians and railwaymen, even in the Metropolitan Police. When Parliament met in February it was faced by the threat of a general strike among the miners, not only for improvements in wages and conditions, but for the abolition of the whole system of private ownership and control. Mr. George's method of meeting this 'Prussianism in the industrial field' was scarcely that by which he had encountered Prussianism in the field of battle. He promised a Royal Commission to inquire into the problems of nationalisation and 'joint control,' as well as into questions of wages, hours, profits and royalties. Nothing, however, would induce the miners to suspend the strike notices unless they were guaranteed an almost immediate finding on hours and wages. This also was conceded, and on the appointed day Mr. Justice Sankey, Chairman of the Commission, reported in favour of a two-shilling a day increase, a seven hour day to come in force at once, and a six hour day to be established in 1921. The recommendations were adopted by the Government, and immediate stoppage was averted, but this respite was purchased dearly. The additional cost could only be met by passing it on to the foreign buyer. The shortened working day, which was, according to the theories of fashionable experts, to increase production, had the opposite result. It was hardly astonishing. Nobody takes up coal-mining as a hobby, and the first use the miner made of his increased means was to purchase more leisure. He absented himself from the pits as often as he could afford to do so, and production suffered.

For a while, however, there was peace and prosperity on the coal-fields, the first won by the Government's concessions, the second by the monopoly prices Britain could still wring from the necessities of the Continent. But the policy of Danegelt produced its inevitable results. Before March was over the railway men, seeing no reason why they should not share in the bounties of the Government, made trouble. Mr. J. H. Thomas, M.P., flew (literally) over to Paris; an accommodation was made; an annual expenditure of ten millions was added to the taxpayers' burden; and the threat of shut stations and lifeless lines, like that of idle mines, was postponed for the moment.

The Government, however, had by no means finished with the miners. When the Sankey Commission presented its final report, showing that half the members and the Chairman favoured nationalisation of the mines, an awkward problem was presented to the Prime Minister. The great strike had been postponed under the impression, well or ill founded, that the Government would give legislative effect to all the material findings of the Commission. The miners now assumed that a Bill to expropriate owners and to place the mines under State control would be promptly passed.

Mad as this sounds, it was strictly in accordance with recent precedents of settling great questions of national policy by reference to a few people of questionable judgment and authority, or by consultation with 'the interests concerned.' The enormous revolution embodied in the new Franchise Act had been arranged by a few party politicians sitting under the Chairmanship of the Speaker; Parliament had little to say concerning the matter, and the country nothing. The 'Transport Bill,' at this time trailing its portentous way through Parliament, was an even more striking example of the narrowest basis of judgment for a great legislative superstructure. The system by which, in the session of 1919, great projects were referred to Committees of the House, was part of the same contempt of average public opinion which would be implied in giving legislative form to the majority report of a Commission of employers, workmen, and faddists sitting under a High Court Judge.

Moreover, Mr. George had used words which might very well, having regard to the situation then existing, be interpreted as a pledge to accept and act on the finding. When, therefore, he declined to proceed, the miners not unnaturally felt not only aggrieved by the refusal, but resentful of what they considered the breach of faith. It is certain that Mr. George never at any time contemplated nationalisation. Apart from any inclinations of his own, his dependence on a House of Commons such as that created by Sir George Younger made such a policy impossible. On the other hand, what was the point of inquiry if the results of the inquiry were not even to be considered? The truth, of course, is that the proposal of the Commission was one of those 'unexpected solutions' which do not solve, one of those adroit moves which gain time at the expense of something even more precious.

But it was not alone the miners who were beginning to gain the impression that the Government was one of shifts and makeshifts. Something of this character was indeed inseparable from its very constitution. Mr. George was no Prime Minister in the old sense, working with colleagues, trusted and trusting, but a very novel kind of dictator, working through subordinates who were some of them secret opponents, some of them mere creatures, and others in some sense masters. His personal ascendancy was as complete as that of Long John Silver over the pirate crew. But, just as every individual pirate had always to be considered as a possible leader of mutiny, and a whim common to all had to be humoured at any cost, so the Prime Minister had to make constant calculations of the 'limit of toleration,' and could never carry through any scheme exactly as he might have wished. On the other hand, so complete was the dependence on him—it might or might not be (compare again the case of Captain Silver) the result of confidence in his judgment or method or intention—that none dared give an important decision in his absence. There were several men who could put a spoke in his wheel; there was none who dared trundle a first-class hoop on his own account. Mr. Bonar Law was a good leader of the House of Commons if we think of the House merely as a debating society; he could keep it in a fair humour and arrange its timetable exactly. Mr. Austen Chamberlain was a fair Chancellor of the Exchequer if we think of that great official merely as a financial barmaid serving all customers on demand with short pulls or long pulls, but not if we regard him as one who has to consider the cellar, and even the malt supply, as well as the beer-engine. Neither was big enough to take the Prime Minister's place. Mr. Churchill could no doubt have done so, but he was estopped by a variety of circumstances, including the very natural jealousy of an old competitor; and as to the rest of the Ministry the inexperience of one section was almost equal to the inferiority of the other.

But though capital questions could never be settled in the Prime Minister's absence, minor (but exceedingly expensive) decisions were taken habitually by heads of departments. The large and perhaps necessary liberty of judgment accorded during Mr. George's war control continued to be extended to little men who had modelled themselves on him, and believed that, in order to be Cromwell, they had only to cultivate Cromwell's pimples. It was in vain that the Prime Minister himself appealed to these small despots to stop the spending in which their importance consisted and to reduce the establishments which flattered their self-esteem. The most hopeless case of all was that of those honest men who had set their hearts on winning imperishable renown as the makers of a new England or the founders of a new Empire. There were Imperialists like Mr. Churchill who wanted to conquer Russia and make the Garden of Eden once more 'God's own country,' with the added advantage of British protection. There were business giants like Sir Eric Geddes who wanted to see every railway, road, dock, canal, and power-house in Britain under the nod of one omnipotent expert in Whitehall. There were Liberals like Dr. Addison and Mr. Fisher, with enthusiasm for houses and schools. There were Conservatives who wanted to turn good pasture into possibly indifferent corn land. For every Liberal scheme there had to be a corresponding Conservative scheme, or Sir George Younger's cohorts would murmur. For every Conservative scheme there had to be a Liberal scheme, or Mr. George's personal followers would wail. Officially all this was called Reconstruction. Unofficially most of it was called Waste.

But, extravagantly costly as were the plans for building the New England, the New England declined to be built. Mr. George had promised a land fit for heroes; the heroes were in waiting, but where was the land in its fitness? Mr. Chesterton once said that a great politician has but two speeches. One, which may be full of imaginative vigour and picturesque charm, is delivered before an election and sets forth what is to be done. The other, which may be a miracle of remorseless logic, is delivered after the election, and proves conclusively that nobody but a fool could expect such wild promises to be fulfilled. A speech somewhat of the latter kind was that which Mr. George extended over some three hours just before the August adjournment. Sir Auckland Geddes* had talked about a certain 'box' in which the secrets of the Government's policy had been bestowed. Whether it were like Pandora's, and the plagues had already escaped to distribute themselves in the Government departments, was never clearly shown, but Mr. George, rummaging at the bottom of it, managed to extract a few stray fragments of hope. His tone, however, was in the main both pessimistic and reproachful. He savagely ridiculed that idea of a good time coming, of what Carlyle would have called a 'lubber-land' of less work and thicker pig's wash, which he had himself done so much to foster. The good time could only be realised by increased production. But there had been a 'sensational decrease in output,' in every branch of industry except agriculture. We were spending more; we were earning less. This was perfectly true; but it could be retorted that the Government, with its inflations, its subsidies, its costly concessions to Labour, its expensive and unproductive schemes, its buyings of present ease at the expense of the future, had in no small degree stimulated the general high living, low efficiency and want of thrift.

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* Then holding several offices, later Ambassador at Washington.

Mr. George's final appeal was for no criticism and 'trust in the man at the wheel.' In one of his less happy metaphors he compared himself to the captain of a boat in the heavy swell which persists after a great tempest :—

> 'Navigation is difficult and dangerous under these circumstances. Some seek to help; some lie prostrate and weary. Some try to upset the boat, either because they dislike the steersman, or want to steer themselves, or because they prefer some crazy craft of their own. With a clear eye and a steady hand and a willing heart, we will row through into calmer and bluer waters, but we must know where we are rowing. The Government have done their best to give a direction. Let all who will man the boat and save the nation.'

If the situation of the nation were really that of this remarkable craft, and its skipper were really as helpless as Mr. George suggested, the only proper comment was clearly that of the passenger in *The Tempest*, 'Our case is miserable.' A less literal criticism, however, was inclined to fasten on one point—did the steersman know where he wanted to steer? Had he any notion where to find the 'calmer and bluer waters,' or—more to the point still—the new land fit for heroes of which he had professed to be the Columbus? Some people were certainly blaming the Government. Some, Mr. George said, were inclined to blame Providence itself. Both classes, it would appear to be his view, were equally unreasonable.

The effect of this speech was to suggest a waning belief in the possibilities of social reform. But a few weeks later, at the City Temple, we find Mr. George in the old bright manner. 'Slums will have to go. I hope the great armaments will disappear. . . . I look forward to seeing waste in every shape and form disappear, and a new Britain spring up, freed from ignorance, insobriety, penury, poverty, squalor, and the tyranny of mankind over man. . . . There are men who seem to imagine that I have accepted the position of leading counsel for the old order of things. Rather than do that I would throw up my brief.'

Was this a hint to less advanced colleagues? Was it some momentary idea of dissolution, disentanglement, and a whirlwind election campaign on the old model? Or was it simply that Mr. George, finding himself among old friends, spoke almost sub-consciously in the old tones? Whatever the case, he was quickly brought to earth by the tyranny of one part of mankind over another, or in other words, by the railway strike of the autumn of 1919. Vanished at once was the dreamer of new worlds; and in his place stood the adroit tactician who, even if he might be a little flurried with apprehensions of Bolshevism, grasped at once the opportunity of making a little advertisement out of that bogey.

The strike was 'engineered,' he telegraphed to his Carnarvon constituents, for 'subversive ends'; it was a 'challenge thrown down to society as a whole' which the Government was bound to accept, and he would meet the blow with 'all the resources of the State.' As a sober matter of fact, the 'anarchist conspiracy' was ended by a commonplace compromise on hours and wages; but the effect of Mr. George's apocalyptic language, and of the vast arrangements which had been made in advance to meet a transport break-down, was to suggest that a real victory had been obtained over the Lenins who carry our golf-sticks and the Trotskys who look suspiciously at our season-tickets. In the glow of this triumph over the forces of evil the public was ready to pay more for its fares. As of old, 'the interests concerned' were not unsatisfied, and the public was so grateful to be able to travel once again that it seemed unworthy to discuss the price of the privilege.

The settlement of the railway strike marked the end of the most threatening phase of the Labour troubles. With Parliamentary criticism, such as it was, suspended, and Labour agitation pausing to gain its second wind, the Prime Minister might have enjoyed some months of comparative quiet. But as the summer of 1919 advanced it became evident that Ireland could no longer be neglected.

A short summary of Mr. George's Irish policy is necessary for the comprehension of the situation. He had been chosen by Mr. Asquith, after the rebellion of 1916, to negotiate the settlement which the Government considered still possible, and more than ever desirable because the existing machinery of Irish Government had broken down. The selection was not altogether happy. Mr. George, who was apparently not vividly interested, contented himself with taking up the old idea of partition, the Home Rule Act to come into force immediately, and six of the Ulster counties to be excluded from its scope. But, as sometimes happens, he did not succeed in conveying to the Irish parties exactly what was in his own mind. The Nationalists gathered that partition was to be a temporary measure, 'for the duration of the war,' the Unionists that it was to be permanent. When the misunderstanding was made evident, it also became clear that no settlement could be reached, and things were allowed to drift for many months.

When he became Prime Minister, however, Mr. George made another bid for Irish good-will by freeing a large number of Irishmen who had been imprisoned or interned after the insurrection. But arrests were resumed in the course of a few weeks, and the Sinn Fein party, which, from being a purely academic body, had risen to political prominence on the morrow of 'Easter Week,' won its first by-election almost immediately afterwards. The Nationalist party, seeing danger to its very existence, if it remained inactive, now began to press strongly for the establishment of the 'free institutions' Ireland had been promised: and after a second Sinn Fein success Mr. George seems to have been seriously impressed by Mr. John Redmond's argument that the Constitutional movement was being killed, and that he would soon have to 'govern Ireland by the naked sword.' He, therefore, submitted two alternative proposals; immediate Home Rule plus partition, or 'a Convention of Irishmen of all parties for the purpose of providing a scheme of Irish self-government.' The Nationalists accepted the latter alternative. Sinn Fein refused its co-operation; the Ulster Unionists accepted only with the reservation that they were not to be bound by any of the Convention's findings; and the want of any settled convictions on the part of the Government—or rather, perhaps, the presence of two sets of mutually destructive convictions—was a handicap.

Nevertheless, the Convention produced a distinct improvement of atmosphere; there were signs of a revulsion from the extreme doctrines of Sinn Fein; and in the spring of 1918 there appeared sufficient prospect of a settlement on the old lines of Home Rule to make Sir Edward Carson decide to leave the Government. But the malign fate which dogs all attempts at Irish appeasement was not idle. On April 9, 1918, the very day on which the report of the Convention was laid on the table of the House of Commons, proposals were made for extending compulsory military service to Ireland. This settled the settlement. The fortunes of Sinn Fein were made in a single day. The Nationalist Party, which (as Mr. George was careful to point out in making a good debating point against Mr. Dillon) had accepted the right of the Imperial Parliament to legislate for Ireland on matters of Imperial concern, was killed. The Irish peasants, inflexible in their opposition to forced service in an Army which stood in their tenacious memories as the instrument of English domination in Ireland, went over bag and baggage to Sinn

Fein. At the election seventy-three Sinn Feiners, pledged not to take their seats in an assembly they repudiated as alien, were returned, and Southern Ireland was practically disfranchised. Lord French was appointed Viceroy, and Mr. Redmond's prediction of rule of the naked sword was fulfilled to the letter.

For a time the Prime Minister remained uninterested. Ireland was still one of the departmental jobs. As late as June, 1919, he declared that he could do nothing because of the intense opposition of Ulster to Home Rule. But two circumstances contributed to compel his reluctant attention. One was the effect of the campaign conducted in the United States by Mr. de Valera, the Sinn Fein 'President,' with the object of rousing American opinion against the Versailles Treaty. It was clear that British policy in Ireland must be justified, or that the dream of close co-operation in world affairs with the United States must be abandoned —a serious matter in view of the extent to which the great Republic was now the creditor of Great Britain. Not less grave was the fact that Ireland was plainly reverting to savagery, and that every week diminished the effective power of the Dublin Government. In December an attempt was made on the life of Lord French, and at the very end of the Session Mr. George announced a policy for Ireland.

Ireland, he explained, was to have not one Home Rule Parliament, but two. So far, in all plans of exclusion, it had been understood that the North-Eastern counties should be ruled from Westminster, and it could always be argued that the time would come when the Ulster members, tired of being an unconsidered body in a House of Commons wearied of Irish affairs, would of their own motion seek union with their fellow-islanders. But a Belfast Parliament must, it would seem, tend to permanent separation. True, there was 'machinery' for common action and even for eventual union, but to a Southern Irishman it would appear that the whole 'drag' must be against, and not for, the realisation of his dreams of one self-governing Irish community.

For the rest Mr. George warned the Irish to abandon vain expectations. The land which by its power had destroyed the greatest military Empire in the world would not 'quail before a band of wretched assassins.' To a British audience, unaware of the change since 1914, this had the right sound. But the speech merely showed that the Prime Minister himself did not appreciate the position. He was still thinking in terms of the old Home Rule. His plan might have formed the basis of settlement in 1914. But five years of neglect and mismanagement, of almost criminal tactlessness, of innocent stupidity and occasional breaches of faith, of alternate repression and concession, had done their work, and at the end of 1919 such a measure in no way corresponded to any Irish reality. In 1916 the Irish people had seen certain of their countrymen, of pure life and high intellect, shot as traitors to the British Crown. The British Government could not be blamed for shooting them; to even a liberal-minded Briton they were wicked and wanton disturbers of the peace. Nor did the Constitutional Home Rulers make unreasonable claims for these men; they generally acquiesced in the necessity for some severity, merely adding, 'The pity of it.' Thus Mr. Dillon, with only a superficial inconsistency, could condemn the rebellion, and declare his pride in the rebels. Southern Irishmen in general, omitting the condemnation, indulged the pride and the sorrow. To them the sufferers were simply patriots and martyrs. Such emotions might have passed had Mr. Asquith's plan succeeded; they were given permanence by what followed. The Nationalists who had sadly acquiesced in the measures of repression and punishment became almost traitors in Irish eyes; to the men who stood for Irish nationality without qualification was transferred all the fierce passion and stubborn courage which had animated the century-long fight against the Union. That nothing might be lacking to stimulate ardour, there was the spectacle of the Peace Conference. In 1919 Czechs, Poles, and Jugo-Slavs were granted their liberties by a Council of which a leading and most conspicuously idealistic member was the head of that British Government which had denied a similar boon to Ireland. If self-determination was to be a principle for the Continent, where no perfect racial or geographical frontiers existed, how could its application be refused to an island so completely marked by nature and culture as separate from Great Britain?

Such was the spirit a combination of circumstances had engendered in a majority of southern Irishmen—a spirit quite inexplicable to all who think of Ireland as a number of rather backward counties separated from England by the sea. It was a spirit which Mr. George, as a Minister of the Crown, had every title to dislike, but which, as the son of a small nation, he should have understood. As a statesman, also, he should have grasped much sooner than he did the true nature of the military problem involved in a policy of repression, while as a professor of 'mass psychology' he should have been free from any illusion as to the effect of that kind of 'strong' action which was, under the Secretaryship of Sir Hamar Greenwood, to make British 'rule' in Ireland a mere nightmare of anarchy.

Yet there were excuses in plenty. The Prime Minister was enormously overworked. He was indifferently served. He was handicapped by his old lack of interest in Irish rights and wrongs, to which was added a natural resentment of Ireland's attitude during the war. He was only too ready to believe one set of advisers who told him but only a little more force was wanted to subdue the 'gunmen.' He was only too ready to believe the other who whispered that all would be put right when the 'murder gang' was conquered, at little or no advance in the price of 1914. Between these two opinions he remained in oscillation, sometimes uneasy, sometimes complacent, until a day came when it was realised that men everywhere outside Great Britain had ceased to talk about the Irish question, and called it by a blunter name.

CHAPTER XXI

One of the most gruesome of the tales of Edgar Allan Poe describes a mesmeric experiment made on a man on the very point of death. By the potency of certain passes he was kept for seven months in apparent trance, able to speak intelligibly and move feebly, and presenting something of the appearance of the living. But all the time he was dead, and when at last the spell was reversed his body liquefied into almost instantaneous putrefaction.

As an illustration of the state of politics under the Coalition the parallel is doubly inexact. Those who watched Mr. Valdemar's body were aware that they were not witnessing the phenomena of life. Nobody can say with certainty when vitality departed from Mr. George's Coalition. Mr. Valdemar's final dissolution came duly with the end of the story. The dissolution of Mr. George's Coalition is still to come; there may be many months, even some years, of a ghastly imitation of life. Otherwise the tale fairly illustrates perhaps the most astounding example of the power of a vivid personality to defy the natural processes of political decay. The feat was probably not worth the pains. It might have been much better had nature and the undertaker been at liberty to complete their respective tasks. But, considered merely as a feat, it commands the admiration of stupor.

Up to the end of 1919 it can be said with confidence that there was life in the Coalition. He who professed loyalty to it could point, if to no fixed principles, at least to certain definite ideas. He could say that, as regarded foreign affairs, he was for the firm maintenance of relations with our late Allies, and hostile to every influence, German, Bolshevist, or whatever it might be, which threatened the security of the settlement of Versailles, or the safety of any State created under it. At home he could say that he wanted—or was reconciled to—certain measures of 'reconstruction' which called for large State expenditure, both of money and of bureaucratic energy, on activities so far left to private enterprise. But during the period subsequent to the end of 1919 this Coalitionist, whether Liberal or Conservative, could give no rational account of his beliefs. He could only describe himself as a follower of the Prime Minister.

We may summarise by saying that before the end of 1919 a wrong vote might be given, but it was given with some sort of reason; after 1919 a right vote might be given, but it was given without any sort of reason, save that the Prime Minister (by whatever impulse he himself were moved) would have it so. In the first year of the new Parliament it was necessary for a Minister to maintain a certain show of consistency; afterwards he might (and often did) jeer at the very Bill he had in charge without the smallest peril to its passage into law. For in truth the Coalition was either dead, and only maintained in the appearance of life by the master mesmerist, or it was suffering the languor of mortal sickness. There remained a certain reaction to stimulus, as there is even in a severed worm, a certain sensitiveness to conditions, as a nearly dead crayfish will show when thrust in hot water. In the Coalition's case hot water, in sufficient quantity, led to feeble convulsive movements. Much talk in the newspapers about waste, the loss of a middle-class constituency, would produce a tremor or two. But there were none of the recognisable phenomena of life. The Coalition had lost not only the power of action; it was even without the first mark of the living creature—the gift of recognising the nature of things. It passed with equal readiness a Bill for doing a particular thing and a Bill to prevent that particular thing being done. It obediently hustled through an indispensable measure at Christmas, and with cheers affirmed the urgent necessity of repealing the same measure six months later.

One thing connected with the Coalition, however, retained a conscious and indeed vehement life. From the first the Conservative Right Wing had been attached rather than incorporated. Its members had sullenly accepted what appeared to be the inevitable, sorrowful because of their great possessions, but on the whole hopeful that the loin of Mr. George would be more slender than the little finger of some British Lenin. But as the fear of Bolshevism diminished their dislike and distrust of his leadership increased; the apparent certainty of being slowly bled to death appeared more alarming than the remote possibility of violent confiscation; and by the end of 1921 the Conservative Right Wing might almost be reckoned a separate party, poorly led, deficient in Parliamentary talent and general distinction, but far from negligible, if only because, in a Parliament where but a very few people knew what they wanted, it at least knew what it did not want. It did not want the Prime Minister.

From the first Mr. George's system had partaken of the character of a dictatorship. When the new House of Commons, after a few feeble efforts to check (or rather to understand), the actions of the Government, fell into the condition of trance described, the decision of public affairs rested more than ever with the Prime Minister and a small knot of his intimates, and the practical limitations on their power were only three—

(1) The fear of 'direct action' by Labour;
(2) limits in the capacity or forbearance of the taxpayer;
(3) the possibility of decay proceeding so far in the Coalition as to make it impossible for its various parts to hang together.

Apprehension on these three points, varying in degree with changing circumstances, is the clue to most things that concern us in the confused story of 1920 and 1921.

The state of the Coalition was a constant source of anxiety to its chiefs. That it should continue inert, uncritical, mindless, was well enough; but what if it visibly died and dissolved? Early in 1920 Mr. Barnes and Mr. Roberts, who had maintained the fiction of Labour co-operation long after the reality had departed, left the Ministry, and their secession, practically unimportant, produced two indirect effects of some interest. Liberalism and Conservatism being now the sole remaining elements, the question naturally arose whether they could, in the political slang of the moment, be 'fused.' Lord Birkenhead* had publicly recognised the 'invertebrate' character of the Coalition, recommending the formation of a 'national' or 'centre' party; and matters went to the length of a meeting of Liberal Ministers to consider the arguments in favour of organic union with the other party. No agreement was reached, however, and Mr. George set aside the idea. Fusion, he said, was a bad word, but 'closer co-operation' was needed in the constituencies.

On both sides, indeed, there were very strong practical objections to amalgamation. The importance of the numerically insignificant and intellectually undistinguished Liberals must diminish considerably if they were absorbed, since Mr. George, as leader of a single party, could not be expected to show absurdly undue preference to those who had been his special followers. On the other hand, the Conservatives were by no means inclined to make those sacrifices in seats and patronage which might be demanded of them through the partiality of the Prime Minister.

There remained the point of view of Mr. George himself. Fusion meant burning his boats; it meant in practice, whatever gloss might be put on it, that he must become a Conservative leader. He must adopt and adhere to a certain line of thought, and (what was even more to the point) a certain tone and temper. Mr. George has always declined to confine himself within any dogmatic ring-fence; he likes to pick and choose his opinions from everywhere, and could hardly be imagined guiding himself by the oracles of even the most broad-minded Toryism. But this difficulty, however serious, was less an obstacle than the mere strain of acquiring the accent of Toryism.

It has not been sufficiently remarked that one of Mr. George's greatest strengths is his unashamed naturalness. A very chameleon in exterior things, he is at bottom stubbornly consistent. He has changed sides and opinions, but he has never changed himself. His style has developed, but it is in essence the style of the

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* Sir Frederick Smith ('F. E.') had become Lord Chancellor under this style.

Mr. Lloyd George, Marshal Foch, and M. Briand on the Terrace at Chequers (1921).

'Brutus' of eighteen; he has never thought it worth while to defer to the taste which finds something tawdry here and something forced there; this is his natural utterance, and the people can take it or leave it; he will have no other. His prejudices have been softened by time and experience, but they remain a part of him; scratch the friend and patron of many millionaires deeply enough, and you shall find very much alive the boy who knew poverty and the proud man's contumely. His early scorn of rank that is but the guinea's stamp has not prevented him creating a formidable new aristocracy, but no man could be less impressed by titles to precedence and more ready (according to his lights) to recognise titles to respect. He will fail to answer a Duke's letter just as cheerfully as he omits to acknowledge a nobody's; and the rich men to whose society he is rather conspicuously partial have to accept his companionship on his own terms. On the other hand, there is none so poor who cannot be sure of a pleasant word, and (if not bankrupt of wit as well as purse) of something more.

When he entertains or is entertained Mr. George generally arranges to be called on the telephone at stated intervals. If the company be dull, he discovers, at the first ring, that affairs of State have unhappily curtailed his pleasure. If the company be agreeable, he may await the second ring, and it is eloquent of much that he is more likely to ignore the first summons when enjoying a quiet chat with nobody in particular than when surrounded by pompous notables.

To 'society' he will have nothing to say, and the freshness, physical and mental, which has survived so much exhausting experience, is due, not only to his habit of leaving detail to men of detail, but to his fixed resolution not to endure the slavery of 'moving' in certain 'circles.' Not without a certain appreciation of magnificence, not insensible to the delicate flattery of a high-born hostess's attention, the spell soon fails, and he has never taken to the kind of life to which for the first forty years of his life he was almost a complete stranger. He plays golf with Lord Riddell because he likes golf, and is fond of Lord Riddell; if either liking were wanting Lord Riddell would have to golf without him. He goes to certain country-houses because the hosts or the amusements or the company promise to please him. No imaginable horse-power, wild or otherwise, will take him where he is likely to be wearied, and it is to be remarked that, while he has no objection to the society of the Peers he has made, or the Peers he intends to make, he is never heard of among the 'backwoodsmen' or the squirearchy. If he thought of cultivating them, the hedge-breaking lad of Llanystumdwy, the poacher-defending young solicitor of Criccieth, would rise from their graves—and very shallow is their resting-place—in protest.

In short, Mr. George has remained, through all changes, in essentials what he was—not, indeed, a 'child of the people,' but the 'cottage-bred' son of an ambitious middle-class man, who has been most of his life a rebel against all that the more vital element in Conservatism stands for. He can become sworn brother to essentially middle-class men like Lord Birkenhead or Mr. Bonar Law. But he finds no joy in exploring the recesses of the rural mind, and, dearly as he loves office, he would probably resign it to-morrow if the condition of his remaining were that he should listen half an hour a day to even Lord Birkenhead's talk about hunting. Nor can he be unmindful of the fate of Mr. Chamberlain, who missed the highest by identifying himself with a party for co-operation with which he was temperamentally unfitted. Mr. George, it is probable, fully recognises that his own personality, intact and unspoiled, is his best asset, and is determined to keep it. If he is ever to lead the Conservative party, it must be on his own terms. The party must be fitted to him, not he to it; and if any spirit is to be broken, it must be its, and not his.

Whatever the motive, he now decided in no way to commit himself, and though, during many months, he said things that might raise the hope that he had decided to throw in his lot with Conservatism, he contrived always to say other things which depressed such expectations; and meanwhile almost ostentatiously expressed his readiness for retirement. Thus, at a meeting of Coalition Liberals on March 18, 1920, he said:—

> 'Personally, I am not concerned with the future. I have had fifteen years of the hardest work almost any man ever had, in every kind of office and in every kind of weather, and, if any change in the political conditions could give me a respite, I would rejoice in it.'

His whole tone about this time was the plaintive-expostulatory. 'You have no idea what it is to run a Government,' he told a hungry deputation, 'with the whole of the newspapers of the Kingdom screaming about your extravagance, and a great outcry about increase of taxation.' The Government, indeed, was between two fires. The numerous subsidies, direct and indirect, had partially and temporarily obscured the fact that, as after all wars, the main part of the bill must be paid by those who toil. If the cruel truth were suddenly revealed in the most practical form, there might be serious trouble. But while the withdrawal of palliatives involved the risk of working-class unrest, their continuance imposed an intolerable burden on the taxpayer. As usual, the Government pursued a purely opportunistic policy. Mr. George talked about 'fighting autocracy,'—'whether of an aristocracy or of a trade union'—but he took no measures seriously calculated to displease Labour until the middle-class electors showed that, whatever sacrifices they might be prepared to make to get the country out of its difficulties, there must be some term to the vast expenditure needed merely to continue a pretence. 'Great is bankruptcy,' says Carlyle, rejoicing that in the end it abolishes unrealities. It needed some warning that, as Mr. Chamberlain expressed it, the country was heading 'straight to bankruptcy,' to determine the Government to put an end to the artificial encouragements and restrictions set up during the war.

The reactions of the Government to these two fears—the fear of Bolshevism and the fear of bankruptcy—are illustrated by contrasting the record of 1920 with that of 1921. At the beginning of the former year the note was still Reconstruction, and the Government was busily occupied with Bills to fulfil various pledges of the 'Land for Heroes' scheme, the list including that Agriculture Bill which, giving guaranteed prices and security of tenure to the farmer, a minimum wage to the labourer, and authority over cultivation to the Government, was to change the face of rural England. The year 1921 saw the destruction of this and other measures, doomed because of their cost. Various Ministries were abolished; Sir Eric Geddes's 'grandiose' Ministry of Transport was reduced to a small sub-department; the new Minister of Agriculture cheerfully tore up the plans he had advocated as a subordinate; and Dr. Addison's housing scheme was so drastically cut that, after a little hesitation, he decided to resign; and a long friendship was ended by Mr. George's ironic congratulations on the applause the resigning Minister received from the Opposition. 'There is always,' he said, 'a plentiful supply of veal for the returned prodigal.' Dr. Addison's departure from the 'Ministry of Health'—a monument to Mr. George's singular passion for calling old things by new names—marks the end of the Reconstruction period. A little more than two years after Parliament had begun the consideration of the 'happier England' programme, scarcely a fragment of it remained.

One measure of retrenchment early in 1921, the 'decontrol' of the coal trade, led to a three months' stoppage which gravely increased the evils of a general depression of trade, and also the widespread unemployment which had been first forced on the attention of the Government by riots in Whitehall in the early winter of the preceding year. Mr. George elected to stand firm; declined to settle on the usual terms of expensive compromise; and made elaborate precautions to preserve peace and carry on essential services in the event of the miners being joined by the railwaymen and transport workers. At the critical moment the 'Triple Alliance' of Labour failed, and the ultimate failure of the miners, thus assured, encouraged the Prime Minister to dismiss his worst fears. Relieved from the immediate dread of

Labour, he was the more accessible to the economists' arguments, and in the autumn of 1921 took the curious step of appointing a Committee of Business Men, under the Chairmanship of Sir Eric Geddes, to perform a task which the Chancellor of the Exchequer was apparently unable to accomplish, namely, the control of departmental expenditure. The Committee's findings suggested relatively immense economies. But it was one thing to indicate counsels of perfection and quite another to enforce them. The system which Mr. George had created had grown too strong for him to control, and the Departments, taking things into their own hands, did merely what they considered necessary to placate public opinion for the time being.

Two things were made evident—the first that no radical reform was possible until either the realities of Cabinet Government had been restored, or a really efficient form of dictatorship had taken the place of the Georgian system; the second that the only possible check on the Government was the direct pressure of public opinion. The House of Commons showed itself incapable, in this as in other matters, of acting for the people, or even of interpreting their thoughts. The mere fact that it could tamely agree to the appointment of a Committee of outsiders to exercise that check on expenditure which is the one great function of the elective Chamber was sufficient evidence of the degradation of the House, as well as of its impotence. If any other testimony were wanted, it could be found in the indifference afterwards shown to the absolutism of individual departmental Ministers.

In these domestic matters the Prime Minister was only intermittently interested. Most of his time was spent in going to, coming from, and staying on the Continent, and his occasional sojourns in London were mainly connected with Party affairs or enforced by some emergency caused by the failure of his caretakers. A slightly increased concern was necessitated after the resignation* of that model 'Deputy Prime Minister,' Mr. Bonar Law, whose departure forced tears from the eyes of one who, whatever his general emotional facility, is much less addicted in public to the melting mood than the intellectually frigid Mr. Asquith, or even than the Cæsarian Mr. Churchill. Mr. Chamberlain, who succeeded Mr. Law, had both qualities and defects which forbade so complete a subordination of personality.

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* In March, 1921.

In the main, however, Mr. George was still able to indulge fully his passion for picnic diplomacy. In this department he was, like his Ministers at home, chiefly engaged in undoing what he had helped at great cost and labour to achieve. In 1919 he had described the Peace, in which 'everybody had helped,' as 'a good Peace, good for everyone but the Germans, and really it is good for them.'* He had also called it 'a great Peace,' a 'very just Peace,' 'a righteous Peace,' and 'a Peace charged with hope.'† But a few months later these views were considerably changed, and the history of the numerous Conferences which ended in 'perfect accord' (invariably followed by an interchange of inspired Press recriminations on both sides) is, for the greater part, the history of Mr. George's attempts to water down this Treaty which, while not vindictive, was to 'vindicate justice.'‡ There were incidental sensations, such as that rather needlessly created over the temporary French occupation of Frankfort, in answer to a German infraction of the Treaty by the movement of troops into the Ruhr Valley. Of a more serious nature was the complaint of the British Government concerning the French recognition of General Wrangel, the last of the Russian anti-Bolshevik adventurers, and that of the French Government concerning a peremptory Note addressed by Mr. Lloyd George to Poland. In neither case was the Allied Government consulted beforehand.

These, however, happily proved only passing incidents. The real strain on the Entente was the divergence of view between Mr. George and successive French statesmen on two subjects—the question of relations with

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* To the Mayor of Dover.

† To the crowd in Downing Street.

‡ Speech in the House of Commons, April 16, 1919.

Russia, and that of the fulfilment by Germany of her engagements under the Treaty of Versailles.

As Mr. George receded from the temper of 1918, two ideas gained ground in his mind. The first was a natural desire to hasten the general settlement of Europe, which he conceived to be impossible of accomplishment until some sort of tolerable relation had been secured with the *de facto* Russian Government. The second was a desire to reduce the money liabilities of Germany to a manageable amount, and thus take a long step towards the resumption of normal trade between Great Britain and her former enemy.

On the first question France was naturally prejudiced against an arrangement with the Bolsheviks which must mean the total loss of the vast sums she had lent to the Czarist Government. That she had a perfect right to maintain this view is incontestable; that she had any reason to complain of Great Britain taking another view can hardly be admitted. Regarding any military dangers from the Bolsheviks or any military measures, direct or indirect, to be taken against them, each Power was entitled to expect unity of action to be observed. But on the question of commercial policy it could hardly be argued that the French view should for ever dominate the policy of Great Britain. It was open to France to dissent; it was hardly reasonable that she should expect the British Government to regard the non-recognition of French pre-war loans as for all time a bar to any kind of British arrangement with Russia.

On this question, therefore, though it was quite possible to argue that Mr. George was under an illusion, that there were no 'bulging corn bins' in Russia, that no basis existed for trade with that unhappy country, he could not be justly accused of pursuing separate aims at the expense of an Ally. Concerning the Prime Minister's attitude to the Versailles Treaty, however, the French were on stronger ground. They could argue with some justice that, while it was open to an outside critic to say that the Treaty was from the first an impossible one, and that any serious attempt to enforce its provisions must bring economic ruin to Europe, such a position was not possible to a statesman who had signed the Peace. He might be at liberty—at some expense to his reputation—to urge modifications on a co-signatory. But he could not justly make it a grievance if such arguments were disregarded in the absence of any suggestion of compensation.

Great Britain, by the nature of the case, had almost automatically obtained satisfaction of her major claims under the Treaty. German naval power had been destroyed; the German Mercantile Marine had been seized; the German colonies had been taken; the special position of Great Britain had been recognised in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Palestine. There was only left her share in the money indemnity. The total of the payments to be made by Germany had not been fixed at the Peace Conference, and has never been fixed since; but the ratio as between the Allies was determined at Spa in 1920. France was to receive 52 per cent. of the whole sum, and the British Empire only 22 per cent. For France, therefore, the question of reparations was doubly important; her need, as a devastated country, was greater, and she had much more to receive. Great Britain had several reasons for being less anxious. Her share was relatively small; she was inclined to believe, with Marshal Foch, that 'German gold' would prove only 'monnaie de singe';* and she had a strong commercial interest in the speedy revival of German prosperity. Germany could only pay an indemnity in paper or goods, but 'dumping' on the scale necessary would be resented by the undersold British manufacturer and workman, while high finance was strongly interested in deprecating any further disturbance of monetary conditions.

In brief, there was the inevitable difference in the point of view of two Powers as far removed as might well be in situation, tradition, instinct and immediate interest. France, her economic strength based mainly on her own land, was not likely to be embarrassed by money or money's worth, from whatever source; indeed, she wanted very badly all she could get. On the other hand, Britain, her economic strength based mainly on the power of her citizens to make things and sell them

* 'The Pomp of Power,' Anonymous.

abroad, was almost willing to bribe people to trade with her. France, with a land frontier and a terrible neighbour, wanted above all security from the military menace, and was continually uneasy concerning Germany's refusal to carry out with honesty the disarmament provisions of the Treaty; concerned, moreover, lest any money saved on the indemnities should be used to restore German military power. England, with no German fleet to fear, was naturally apt to think the French fussy and over-nervous, perhaps also a little overbearing.

Frequent changes in the French Government added to the trouble. The unpopularity of the Treaty in France was shown in the defeat of M. Clemenceau's candidature for the Presidency, and his fall was followed by a succession of unstable administrations, which perished one after another, through the suspicion of weakness in insisting on French rights. In such circumstances it was not unnatural that the British public should be led to conceive of Mr. George as opposing a firm but gentle and entirely reasonable resistance to an aggressive, vindictive and militaristic France. The impression was heightened by the imprudently bitter and sometimes insulting tone of a section of the French Press, and it was not easy for the student of the London newspapers, particularly of those which reflected the views of the Government, to grasp the plain fact that no French Statesman had ever sought more than the Treaty gave France; all that was asked was that Germany should be compelled to carry out the more essential of her engagements, thus enabling France to advance the work of European settlement by herself settling down.

Germany, always hoping for disagreement between the Allies, gave small heed to such threats as were from time to time perfunctorily put forward concerning penalties for non-compliance. Two years after the Treaty had been signed Mr. George had to admit that disarmament had been most imperfectly carried out, and the position afterwards grew rather worse than better. On the subject of reparations there had been revisions always in favour of Germany, in return for promises which had only proved the starting ground of new discussions. On the subject of the punishment of war criminals Mr. George's post-Conference attitude had contrasted curiously with his enthusiasm during the election campaign and the peace-making. Indeed, on almost every point Mr. George had shown himself anxious to moderate the terms which he described in 1919 as just and good for everybody, even for the late enemy. Naturally enough, he had been commended for his 'return to common sense' by that section of British opinion which was always opposed to indemnities, or indeed to any form of penalty. But equally naturally the French, who had been generally most concerned in any remissions, had been inclined to ask three questions :—

(1) If the Treaty is so bad and unworkable, why did Mr. George sign it?

(2) If it is a great British interest, and indeed the interest of the whole world, that Germany should be released from her obligations, why should that interest be served at the chief expense of France?

(3) Is it not a little hard that, because France continues to press for rights under the Treaty vitally important to her, she should be lectured as if she were the only obstacle to the complete appeasement of Europe?

These facts have to be considered in connection with the irritation which the frequent imprudence and occasional bad taste of French comment occasioned in Great Britain. Admiration of the personal qualities of the Prime Minister, approval of the great aims for universal pacification he has so eloquently indicated, have rather obscured the fact that to a Frenchman—even a Frenchman who, like M. André Tardieu, remained unforgetful of Mr. George's past services and convinced of his present goodwill to France,—it seemed that, if the reparation clauses of the Treaty were to be declared impossible of execution, France should be in some way compensated for and secured against the consequences of failure to execute them.

The monotonous spectacle of a passively resisting

Germany, of an actively protesting France, of an England utterly weary and befogged, was occasionally varied by difficulties farther afield. Thus, warlike operations between Poland and the Bolsheviks came in the summer of 1920 to complicate matters, and provoked the sole serious evidence on the part of British Labour of a disposition to Sovietism. The despatch of British troops, and even of munitions, to the help of the hard-pressed Poles, was opposed by a 'Council of Action' which to some bore the aspect of a British Soviet. Fortunately, the success of the Polish Army settled this as well as larger issues, and little further was heard of the Council of Action.

Another foreign complication was the death of the young King of the Hellenes from a monkey bite, the fall of Venizelos, and the restoration of King Constantine. Despite the declaration that the welcomed return of this monarch could 'only be regarded as ratification by Greece of his hostile acts' against the Allies during the war, Constantine enjoyed at least the benevolent interest of the Prime Minister in his war with the Turks.* In January, 1921, Mr. George declared that 'the Mediterranean was vital to Great Britain,' and that the 'friendship of the Greek people' was wanted; also that the Turks were 'treacherous,' and that he could not deal with a 'mutinous General' like Kemal Pasha. This patronage of Greece led ultimately to the loss to the Cabinet, in March, 1922, of the pro-Turkish Secretary for India, Mr. Edwin Montagu, whose publication of a departmental document strongly traversing the policy of the British Government was quaintly, if with justice, denounced by Mr. George as wholly out of keeping with the traditions of Cabinet unity.

As 1921 advanced the Prime Minister became more and more impressed with the necessity, not only of a settlement of the questions between the Allies and Germany, but of a general pacification of Europe, and revived his schemes for calling the Bolshevists and Germans into conference. The first step to these ends, a conference at Cannes, at the beginning of 1922, at first promised well, but the downfall of M. Briand, the then French Premier (who had been so imprudent as to appear on the golf links with Mr. George), led to its collapse, and also to the failure of a plan for a defensive Anglo-French 'pact.' M. Poincaré, who became President of the Council of Ministers, revealed a marked preference for the older machinery of diplomacy. However, the project of a Conference at Genoa, with Bolshevists and Germans in attendance, was realised, and if circumstances conspired against the realisation of the rather extravagant hopes the British public had been encouraged to form concerning it, the meeting at least again illustrated the unique influence which Mr. George's fame, position and gifts gave him in council with European statesmen. He achieved every kind of success but success itself.

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* Culminating in the great disaster suffered by the Greek Armies in the autumn of 1922, and the ensuing complications with the Nationalist Turks.

From participation in the more fruitful negotiations at Washington, where Mr. Balfour (soon to be rewarded—or punished—by an earldom) was able to conclude a valuable agreement with the United States on the Pacific question and the limitation of naval armaments, Mr. George was excluded by his absorption in the Irish problem.

The passage of the Home Rule Bill in 1920 had (as might have been anticipated) contributed nothing to pacification; the only point gained was Ulster's practical admission that the blank negative could no longer be maintained. In reply to Mr. Asquith, who had suggested that 'Dominion Home Rule' was now the minimum which would suffice, Mr. George protested against the 'fatal doctrine' that 'you should go further and give more, not because Ireland needs it, not because it is fair to the United Kingdom, but because crime has been more successful.' He was not to be 'bullied by assassins'; what was happening in Ireland was 'not war, but murder.' Later in the year he ridiculed the 'little imitation Gladstones'—Sir John Simon and others—who criticised the policy of reprisals which had been adopted under Sir Hamar Greenwood, and in rejecting some indirect overtures from Sinn Fein he characterised them as too much in the tone of one independent Power to another. He was willing for peace, but violence must first cease, and Sinn Fein must first agree to work the Home Rule Act.

Violence did not cease; there was instead a terrible crescendo of outrage and reprisal. Troops fired on a crowd watching a hockey match at Dublin; the next night a number of officers were barbarously murdered in their bedrooms. Sinn Feiners ambushed troops in the outskirts of Cork; as a sequel almost the whole of the centre of the City, including the City Hall, the Corn Exchange, and the Free Library, was burned down. For months an apathetic public watched, with a detachment eloquent of the decline of all sense of political values, the drear progress of decivilisation. This insensibility was less stoical than pathological; when a man is unaffected by the burning of his toes we do not admire his bravery in bearing pain, but rather feel that he is about to lose his leg; and to many it was clear, from the indifference shown by the House of Commons and the newspapers, that Sinn Fein had only to persist, and it must succeed.

History will no doubt point to Sir Hamar Greenwood's administration as snapping the last thread binding England and Ireland under the old dispensation. A Liberal member of Parliament of Canadian extraction, his courage and activity were only exceeded by his misunderstanding of the situation. He seems to have viewed the Irish troubles as a sort of Red Indian rising which could be put down with due use of force so long as there was no troublesome public opinion to embarrass its application. A main part of his policy was, therefore, to baffle inquiry, and in this he showed great address. His measures could hardly have solved the Irish question. But they might quite possibly have quelled the Sinn Fein rebellion had there existed in Ireland, outside of Ulster, an active public opinion in favour of the Government. In fact there was none. Even the Southern Irish Unionists, having lost all confidence in the power and resolution of Great Britain to stand by them, were unwilling to take up an attitude which exposed them to the risk of actual extermination.

The rest of the Southern Irish population was cowed by the Sinn Feiners, or sympathetic with them as to ends, if not as to means, or sullenly neutral. Nowhere was there to be found hearty co-operation with authority on the part of a large body of the people.

In such circumstances a comparatively small force was unable to keep any semblance of order in a country singularly adapted to guerilla operations. In November, 1920, Mr. George declared that we had 'murder by the throat.' Less than a year later it was evident that 'murder' was less restrained than ever. The King's rule had gradually weakened until it might be said hardly to exist over great areas. Protection could not be given to many loyalists, and they were forced, however reluctantly, to make terms with Sinn Fein; while the fact that matters were on the whole better where Sinn Fein held almost undisputed sway than in the debatable grounds alternately over-run by both forces, was not without its influence in weakening any internal resistance to the revolutionists.

At last, in the early summer of 1921, Mr. George began to realise the true nature of the situation. It was clear that the Greenwood plan failed; the Government's grip on the throat of murder was even looser than it had been a year or two years before; and meanwhile the British name and fame had suffered greatly not only in the United States, but in the British Dominions overseas. Continuance in that particular policy must, it was now seen, ultimately lead to both moral and material bankruptcy. For the rest, there were but two courses. One was to re-conquer Ireland, by regular military methods and in fundamental fashion. But the cost of military operations on the requisite scale must be enormous, and a scarcely less serious consideration was the fixed disinclination of the British nation for more fighting. Conscription for such a purpose was scarcely thinkable; while the price of each soldier voluntarily enlisted would be prohibitive. The country might, indeed, be roused to a great effort if convinced that the only alternative were a literal translation into fact of that carelessly repeated scrap of rhetoric, which had done duty through thirty-five years of political agitation, 'the disruption of the Empire.' But clearly the country was not yet so convinced, and could not be so convinced until the aims of Sinn Fein had been definitely and seriously formulated. Mr. George, therefore, decided on the second course, politely called negotiation, impolitely 'shaking hands with murder.'*

Opportunity was taken of the opening of the Northern Irish Parliament on June 22nd, 1921, to put in the mouth of the King an appeal for a general Irish settlement, and a few days later the Government set forth concrete suggestions for a Conference to 'explore to the utmost' that possibility. Early in July a 'truce' was arranged; an offer of 'full Dominion status' to Southern Ireland was made; and, though it was rejected by Mr. de Valera and the Dail Eireann, the Irish professed willingness to enter into conversation 'on the principle of government by the consent of the governed.'

A long process of manœuvring for position followed. The Prime Minister, who had felt compelled to take a holiday,—his first since the outbreak of war—conducted the correspondence from the heart of the Scottish Highlands, in the intervals of sitting to a dentist and taking medicines, of which perhaps the most efficacious was a Chaplin film brought specially up from London. In his search for a 'formula' the Prime Minister had arrived, by September 9, at the suggestion of a conference to ascertain how the 'association of Ireland with the community of nations known as the British Empire could best be reconciled with Irish national aspirations.' This invitation was withdrawn when Mr. de Valera coupled his acceptance with the proviso that the Irish delegates should be recognised as the representatives of a sovereign State; but on September 29 the formula was varied to mere insistence on the unity of the British Empire. Mr. de Valera thereupon agreed to 'explore every possibility by personal discussion,' and on October 11 the Conference first sat at Downing Street.

It is unnecessary to trace here the vicissitudes of the discussions. Mr. George, with all his dexterity, could not have carried them to a successful issue but for the co-operation of the Unionist members of his Government, who, once converted to the policy of conciliation, almost exceeded him in their resolution to give it effect. Mr. George himself was probably at first anxious mainly to justify his past administration in the eyes of the nation and the world, and to prove that if an intensive war must be waged the responsibility was solely Sinn Fein's. But as time went on he became impressed by the possibilities of a genuine settlement, and from the moment of this conviction the 'steadiness to pursue ends, flexibility to vary means,' for which he is remarkable, were fully enlisted on the side of agreement. Ulster, of course, could not be won to the proposal of an All Ireland Parliament with 'special guarantees,' and it seemed at one stage probable that the negotiations would be wrecked on this not unreasonable refusal to vary an arrangement which, only reluctantly accepted as the lesser of two evils, now seemed to the Northern population its sole safeguard. The indivisibility of Ireland, it must not be forgotten, was as much a dogma with Sinn Fein as its virtual independence.

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* Sir Henry Wilson, since barbarously murdered, bluntly described the Prime Minister's action (to his face) in these terms.

In the end Mr. George presented a pistol to the heads of the Irish delegates. In the early morning of December 6 he gave them their choice, the immediate resumption of 'war' or signature of the 'Treaty' creating an 'Irish Free State' separate from 'Ulster.' Faced with a terrible responsibility, the Sinn Fein delegates signed at 2.30 a.m. More than one of them afterwards declared that nothing but the thought of what refusal might imply to Ireland induced him to put pen to paper, and the disclosure of the facts was destined to exercise a powerful influence on Irish opinion. The time had probably come for decisive action, and Mr. George's instincts for the psychological moment are not to be lightly challenged. But the subsequent schism in the Dail and the country, handicapping the Provisional Government, pitting Mr. de Valera against Messrs. Collins and Griffith, producing a miserable kind of civil war, and involving the death of the two most notable men who had accepted the settlement, tended to diminish

Mr. Lloyd George, Dame Lloyd George, and Miss Megan Lloyd George in the Long Gallery at Chequers (1921).

the enthusiasm at first evoked by this bold stroke. In Great Britain, however, Mr. George had little difficulty in disposing, for the time being, of any opposition. 'Is it to be laid down,' he asked, in defending the Treaty before the House of Commons on December 14, 'that no rebellion is ever to be settled by pacific means? If the terms are good, are they never to be negotiated with rebels? Whom else could we have negotiated with?' At the Imperial War Cabinet, he said, 'There were representatives of all the Dominions, but there was one vacant chair. . . . Henceforward that chair will be filled by a willing Ireland, radiant because her wrongs have been settled.'

The 'radiance' of Ireland is still one with the 'ripe and refreshing fruit' of an earlier period in the orator's life. It is, unhappily, all too clear that a bargain enforced by lawlessness is a very different thing from that which represents concession to a constitutional demand. But though we cannot yet talk, in reference to Ireland, of a 'permanent solution,' we can point to something scarcely less decisive, a permanent dissolution.

From the moment that the Unionist leaders concurred in Mr. George's retreat from the position of 1920,* the 'too too solid' political combination which had been powerful enough to forbid every scheme of Irish settlement since 1886, melted, thawed, and resolved itself into a dew. Cement might have been devised for a mere schism; but this was no fracture, but a chemical change. The whole philosophy of 'Unionism' had gone. It had lived on a denial of Irish nationality; it now concurred in recognising Ireland as a nation. It had claimed always that force, wisely and resolutely applied, was the appropriate remedy for all Irish discontents distinct in character from English, Scottish, or Welsh discontents. It now acknowledged that the chief of all Irish discontents was connected with the desire of Irishmen to create a culture and mould a destiny of their own, and that neither repression nor pampering could remove that desire. Considering that the Unionist chiefs, in arguing for the measures necessary to give effect to the Irish 'Treaty' on the side of Great Britain, had to demolish every shred of their own case against much less fundamental changes in the relations of the two countries, they performed their task with great ability, and, it must be added, with a magnanimous disregard of personal considerations. But they could hardly be surprised or aggrieved if, among the men whom they had for years whipped up to frenzy against any form of Irish self-government, there were now a number who saw in their new open-mindedness only a shameless apostacy.

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* Speech at Carnarvon, October 9. 'Was there ever,' he asked, referring to Dominion Home Rule, 'such lunacy proposed by anybody?'

It is possible that another generation may acclaim Mr. George's concession of Irish self-government as more than a sufficient set-off to the defects of a system which, however well suited to purposes of war, had exposed its weakness in three years of peace administration. The philosopher may dwell on the singularity that what was denied to the consistency and earnestness of so many great men was achieved, almost as a holiday task, by a statesman who had never given any consecutive attention to the Irish question, and whose attitude to it had always been one of rather fatigued opportunism. On the other hand, yet another weary chapter may have to be added to the miserable story of Anglo-Irish misunderstanding. Prophecy is especially dangerous regarding things Irish. But it is fairly safe to say that three definite results will be found to have followed the decision of Mr. George to 'negotiate with rebels.'

The first and greatest result is that in some form or another Irish nationality will be recognised by future British Governments; if a positive has not yet been achieved, the whole negative has broken down. The second is that the Conservative Party has to choose between its old leaders and its old philosophy; it cannot have both. The third is that the Coalition, in giving birth to the Irish Free State, signed its own death-warrant, though the date of execution was left blank.

The so-called 'Die-Hard' Opposition in Parliament was negligible. But its strength, as the one quite earnest thing in the politics of the moment, was seen when Sir George Younger declared in the beginning of 1922 against the early general election desired by the Prime Minister, flushed by the results of Washington and anxious to make full electoral use of the Irish Treaty. The outburst of savage joy when Mr. Montagu resigned was something more than a testimonial to the late Indian Secretary's unpopularity with the Conservative Right Wing; it was also an advertisement that the Irish Treaty would neither be forgiven nor forgotten. The fewness of the malcontents, their lack of any leadership of note, made their articulate opposition of little account. But that they, and not the Unionist leaders, represented the basic realities of Conservatism, may have been the reflection which led that shrewd politician, the Earl of Derby, to decline the post left vacant by Mr. Montagu.

What reflections were Mr. George's when, after patching up his weakening Ministry, he retired to Criccieth, there to be photographed planting potatoes ? 'Il faut cultiver notre jardin.' But for his passion for employment, and his sincere conviction that he alone could save the country in peace as in war, it would be easy to imagine him, like the Roman Emperor to whom he was compared, telling some restless Maximian—Mr. Churchill, or another—that there was nothing equal to growing prize vegetables. A calm review of the state of the national garden might, indeed, well have inclined one of less sanguine nature to compete in future only for the innocent triumphs of the local flower show. Disordered, blighted, 'swarming with caterpillars,' it was, indeed, no encouraging spectacle to one who had so sedulously sown it with promises, watered it with eloquence, and manured it with gold. Declining revenue, inflated expenditure, depressed trade, no trace left of the great schemes of reconstruction except the heavy bills for the cost of their mere inception, a discontented working-class, a middle order apathetic and hopeless under the burden of excessive taxation, taking refuge from thought in mere frivolity, even the richest beginning to wonder whether such 'insurance against Bolshevism' as fifteen shillings in the pound taxation were worth while, a House of Lords degraded by undignified new creations, a spiritless and discredited House of Commons, a cynically distrustful public—such were the most obvious results of three years of intense labour.

There might be some consolations. A period of great danger had passed without striking disaster; the damage to material interests was not irreparable; the tax collector had not yet killed, though he had seriously threatened, that individual ambition and energy which, if permitted free scope, will ultimately restore disordered public finances to health. Abroad there was the same limited occasion for congratulation. Though the understanding with France had been weakened, it had not been destroyed; it was just possible to hope with the idealists that a regenerate Germany would not be tempted to reverse the verdict of 1918; the worst dangers in Eastern Europe had been averted; in India, Egypt, and elsewhere the proverbial luck of the British Empire had so far not altogether deserted it; at Washington able statesmanship, with good fortune, had falsified forebodings of a new armaments competition.

But on the whole a realistic Prime Minister, planting his potatoes, could hardly have been exhilirated by a review of that phase of Peace Coalition which had just been completed. His personal affairs had prospered. As an individual, he had been placed in a position of money independence by Mr. Andrew Carnegie's legacy of two thousand a year. As a servant of the State he was now splendidly housed at Chequers,* and his week-ends among the beechen glories of that Buckinghamshire pleasance might well compensate for any shortcomings of Downing Street, which, with its rabbit-warren of huts for Secretaries and clerks, had shed any pretensions it might once have had to be a home. As head of the Coalition his power and prestige were apparently higher than at any previous time. In neither House could he discern a possible rival; in the Cabinet his authority, if actually not greater than in the days of the war, was far more assured. Those of its members who were not his creatures were now apparently bound to him by the mere law of self-preservation.

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* Chequers, which had been given by Lord and Lady Lee of Fareham, to be for ever a country house for Prime Ministers, was placed at Mr. George's disposal in Jan., 1921.

His one complete triumph, indeed, was his domination of a body of men which included many so different in character and antecedents. But against this success had to be weighed a failure which to a man of his temperament may have seemed,—if indeed he were objectively minded enough to recognise it—more tragic than any disappointment in the field of policy or administration.

His hold on the popular mind had fatally weakened. He could still, of course, hold a great meeting entranced. He could still play on an audience, whether in the country or the House of Commons, as if it were an instrument. But he no longer roused strong emotion in the masses whom the voice of the most industrious orator cannot reach. In 1900 the common people detested him. In 1909 those who were not bewitched were in the main amused by him. In the years of the war those who did not execrate idolised him. In 1922 the general public merely accepted him as part of the fixed and apparently unchangeable order of things. He had become an institution, and few institutions rouse enthusiasm. People were not ungrateful for his war services; they resented any attack or criticism on the ground of anything he had done or neglected up to the Armistice as if it were something in the nature of blasphemy. They were not captious even regarding the peace-time dictatorship; he might not have managed quite well, but the task was colossal, and who would have done better? They were apparently not anxious for a change; change seemed duller even than continuance in routine. They were, in a word, not hostile, or unrecognising, or complaining. They were simply very tired.

For once Mr. George had made a mistake in 'mass psychology.' He had neglected the sound rule of *non bis in idem*. During the war his energy had acted on England as a brass band on a tired regiment. His mistake after the war was that he went on with the dose. He imagined that England still wanted waking up. It was a very bad mistake, indeed. England wanted politically nothing so much as to go to sleep, and Mr. George, who could dance gracefully in land reform sabots, or tread majestically in quasi-military jackboots, has never had a talent for list-slippers.

CHAPTER XXII

THIS narrative will have failed in its purpose if, in relating the acts and illustrating the opinions of its subject, it has not also conveyed a definite impression of his personality. It may be of advantage, however, to add a few words concerning some aspects of Mr. George which could not be conveniently treated in the course of so summary a review of so crowded a life.

First as to his physique. He is generally conceived as 'little,' and in fact he is below the medium height; he stands about five feet six and a half inches. But he hardly gives the impression of a small man, still less of an insignificant one. For attention is at once concentrated on the noble head and fine torso, and it is only by degrees that one realises that Nature has not fully carried out her promising plan for a completely splendid human being. One of Gilbert's heroes was fairy down to the waist, but his legs were mortal. Mr. George is demi-god to the fourth, perhaps the fifth, button of his waistcoat, but below that of quite ordinary clay. Every caricaturist has insisted on the fact of this *diminuendo*, and a writer may perhaps be excused for mentioning it, even if he does not find here a clue to the inconsistencies of Mr. George's complex character.*

The first impression of the face at close quarters is its health; the skin is tighter, the complexion purer, the whole effect more muscular and virile than photographs or a distant view might suggest. The second impression is of great strength, and (despite the generally genial expression) of some ruthlessness. The head is held with the poise of a fencer, and the keen blue eyes express, in the case of a new acquaintance, a certain challenge that adds to the impression of a life-long duellist to whom it has become a habit never to take it for granted that the friend of to-day will not be the enemy of to-morrow; one feels the presence of a sceptical vigilance that never takes holiday. Those eyes are very wonderful. Sometimes they express pure fun. Sometimes they are as devoid of emotional quality as optical lenses, so completely are they occupied in mere seeing. At another time they kindle with the wrath of an honestly indignant man; again they reveal a tenderness which explains why their owner, in some critical moments in his own history and the country's, has gained his point with solid and stolid business men solely by an appeal—but such an appeal!—to 'sentiment.' Often, on the other hand, they suggest little but craft.

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* As does the author of 'Mirrors of Downing Street.'

In town Mr. George dresses smartly enough, with a tendency to the quietly grey morning coat and the tall hat; in winter this goes with an astrakhan-collared overcoat. But his heart is not in clothes, and whenever he is in a position to loaf he revels sartorially in 'shapeless idleness'; his country hats and caps are an astonishment, if not a hissing.

His personal tastes are simple. He cares little for elaborate meals and retains the countryman's liking for 'high tea.' He prefers to have people to breakfast rather than to dinner, and lunch at 10 Downing Street, even when there are guests, is a modest affair. Though no teetotaller—he has no objection to a glass or two of wine—spirits have no attraction for him. But he loves a cigar, and still retains a certain affection for the pipe. The motor-car is merely a convenience of transport, though his taste is here for luxury; he is driven to and from Chequers or the golf course in the most expensive thing known to the automobile world. For golf he has more passion, but after all it is chiefly valued for its effect on fitness and its convenience as lending informality to a talk on politics or things connected with politics. And in Mr. George's case everything is more or less connected with politics.

Few living statesmen have read more, despite all that is said of his want of interest in literature. He is especially addicted, strange to say of one so unhistorical in temperament, to history; and has much curious knowledge in unsuspected directions. Mention some half-forgotten eighteenth century statesman, and you will be struck with the impromptu revelation of lore ordinarily associated with specialist study. Mention a seventeenth-century poet, and you will find no response, unless he happens to have written hymns or affords good political quotations that can be applied to-day. An exception to the ruling passion might seem to be Mr. George's theological interest, but probably a good part of his reverence for the great preachers of his race may be attributed to the fact that they were political chiefs as well as spiritual pastors. A Chequers house-party is therefore emphatically political in character; and though there may be a multitude of good stories, and many clever things may be said, the conversation suffers from a certain monotony. So does the company. It is—in the strictest sense—an *ad hoc* company. Mr. George is too busy a man, as well as too much a man of one interest, to waste his sweetness on an air politically desert. Mr. Asquith found time to exchange views on minor poetry with minor poets. Mr. George is strictly utilitarian.

In truth his work leaves him little leisure for anything that is not either pure recreation, or only another kind of work. For many months on end his routine was something as follows :—

7 a.m. Morning tea, telegrams and urgent despatches.
8 a.m. Morning papers.
9.15 a.m. Breakfast, generally with a business guest or two.
10 a.m. Reception of Secretaries, Minister, etc.
11.30. War Cabinet.
1.45 p.m. Lunch, usually with official guests.
3 to 5. Reserved for deputations. In their absence a short rest.
5 p.m. Second meeting of War Cabinet.
5.30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Callers on urgent matters.
8 p.m. Dinner, followed by the evening papers and (when possible) some private reading.
10 p.m. Bed.

When we add occasional big speeches in the country or the House of Commons, consultation with whips and party officials, and telephonic communications with Ministers at both Houses of Parliament, some estimate may be formed of the almost overwhelming burden of war work; and the peace brought rather a variation than an alleviation of stress. 10 Downing Street has therefore less of the character of a home than under any previous occupant, and the small family circle is lost in the crowd of functionaries multiplied by the peculiar system Mr. George has added to the machinery of State. The 'two nice boys' to whom Mr. George referred in one of his earlier war speeches are seldom seen there. The antipathy to politics they felt in their childhood, because Parliamentary duties implied their banishment from the pure air of Wales, has persisted in manhood, and neither of them takes in any material particular after the father. Dame George (or Mrs. George, as she prefers to be called) conscientiously and with success performs all the duties of her position, but has no great love for society, and is rather timid and defensive in her attitude to the great; Miss Megan Lloyd George, on the other hand, enjoys seeing, from her seat on the arm of her father's chair, something of how and by whom mankind is governed.

To all who reach his room at Downing Street, or who are privileged to sleep at Chequers, Mr. George shows the same frank and easy good-humour, suggesting that he is a man without secrets. But it has been observed that, though systematic reserve may be sometimes overcome, systematic familiarity is impregnable; and this is certainly true of Mr. George. Living at times on the most intimate terms with fellow-Ministers, he has never delivered to anybody the keeping of his political soul. Mr. Churchill and he were at one time almost brothers, and after their temporary estrangement was at an end something of the old familiarity was re-established. But there were recesses in the Georgian mind, and plans in the Georgian pigeon-hole, which no effort of Mr. Churchill could discover. Curiously enough, the politician who probably came nearest to the real Lloyd George was Mr. Bonar Law.

For the rest, Mr. George is very fond of the theatre, or at least of the lighter forms of dramatic art, and specially favours revues. It is a historic fact that he enjoys the cinema humours of Mr. Charles Chaplin, and at Sir Philip Sassoon's place at Lympne, where he used to be a frequent visitor, the private film installation afforded him amusement. During an important conference in London he and M. Briand spent a whole evening, much to the delight of a cosmopolitan crowd, in visiting cinemas in Soho. But we have the authority of an American expert, that, generally speaking, he is 'no fan for the flickering celluloid.'

It remains to consider the qualities which have brought the Welsh schoolmaster's son and the Welsh shoemaker's nephew to an eminence so great that even such trifling personal facts are not without interest. Those who have never considered how large an element in success of any kind is mere appetite may be disposed to smile when it is suggested that a main factor in this wonderful story is simply Mr. George's abnormal zest. What, after all, chiefly explains things as various as the literary output of Charles Dickens, the marvellous political career of Mr. Gladstone, and the resounding success to-day of somebody's soap or somebody else's newspapers? We talk loosely of genius, exceptional powers of organisation, prescience, judgment, and the like, but it may be rationally held that the difference between success and failure, or between moderate and sensational success, is often accounted for by the mere difference in the capacity of men to get and remain interested in what they happen to be doing. Long before the young Lloyd George had revealed any extraordinary capacity he had given signs of the most voracious appetite for all kinds of experience, and if we closely examine his career in all its stages we shall be less impressed by any extraordinary superiority of intellect than by his power—Dickens's was very like it—of throwing all of himself into almost any subject, however trivial or apparently dull, which might happen to engage his fancy. If he takes up a thing, it is, for the time at least, with all his mind and all his strength.

It is said that just before his resignation Mr. Bonar Law was talking about the almost overwhelming difficulties before the Government. 'Life is full of anxieties,' he sighed. 'Yes,' exclaimed the Prime Minister. 'But it is very interesting.' To Mr. George the one great fact about life is that it is interesting. He can feel its tragedy; he is open to its humour; he was once, and perhaps still is, an optimist as to its earthly possibilities; absorption in the day's business has not banished belief in its higher significance, for though the days of the Disciples of Christ now lie very far away he can, as we have seen, still find more than an intellectual pleasure in a fine sermon, and 'those incomparable Welsh hymns' can still bring 'balm to the wounded soul.' But the main thing about life is after all its inexhaustible interest. It is not only a great show, but a great game, and of all joys the greatest is to be a chief manager of the show, arranging the exits and the entrances, and a chief player at the game, winning the loudest plaudits.

Appetite, however, has its limitations, like everything else. Dickens could not get back to Pickwick, though he tried; Lord Northcliffe, having put the whole of himself into *Answers*, as a young man, could not make a new *Answers* in middle life; Mr. George has equally found it difficult to return to his early loves. It was with but half a heart that he returned as Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Disestablishment enthusiasms of his free lance period; we feel a wholly different quality in the social reform apostle of the Budget days and the framer of the 'land for heroes' policy; we are even conscious of a weariness in the would-be 'General Manager of Europe' that was not present when Mr. George, as the ex-Pacificist, first tasted the full fascination of high politics. He has, in short, the defects of a great quality. Attracted to questions by their interest, he is too apt to forget that when they cease to interest him they do not cease to be important; and what he gains by the marvellous concentration of energy on a question which is 'uppermost' is prone to be lost by his weariness of the whole subject when it imperiously claims attention no longer.

Another strength (which is also a weakness in its degeneration) is the emotionalism which mingles so curiously with the trite common sense of the middle-class man. It is quite impossible that Mr. George's fervours, any more than Mr. Job Trotter's tears, can be always genuine. But even Mr. Trotter was capable of sincerity, and there has never been lacking to Mr. George's sentimentalities a foundation of real sympathy with the obviously miserable, of genuine revolt against the more theatrical forms of oppression. Unfortunately, men so enjoy using a special talent that they invariably misuse it, and when emotional eloquence comes so easily, and acts so powerfully, there must always be a temptation to overdo it, or use it without justification. Mr. George cannot escape the suspicion of sometimes employing a decidedly pious style to advance or disguise aims which, though not unworthy, are certainly not unworldly. It may be fairly claimed for him, however, that if he is, perhaps, responsible for introducing a new cant into politics, he has also imported a new power. Before his time it sufficed, in order to prove that all was well with the world, and that God was really in his Heaven, that the politician should be able to show that there had been no break in the triumphal march of statistics. The later Lloyd George, himself quite comfortable, has no doubt forgotten much that was very present to an earlier Lloyd George, with recent memories of the house-keeping at Llanstumdwy. But it would be unjust to take no count of the fact that, though his concrete plans of social reform were open to criticism, the spirit which informed them was more human than any that had inspired our politics since the last embers of the French revolution had been stamped out. If there is now, despite all confusions and retrogressions, a less brutal valuation of progress, which even the dustiest of politicians cannot wholly ignore, it has come through him rather than through the professed Socialists, who know nothing of emotion.

His vanity is a strength as well as a weakness. If it makes him almost comically sensitive to attack, if it gives him a morbid care for his fame, it contributes to his marvellous self-confidence, helps him to combat occasional lapses into despondency, and saves him from that common failing of the uplifted middle-class man—a failing from which even Gladstone was not wholly exempt—reverence for mere birth or position. He is so aware of his own greatness that he can treat all men, or nearly all, with the same tolerant and unadmiring good-humour. If he likes the society of a certain kind of rich person, it is merely because he finds that kind of rich person either useful or amusing. But he thinks little of him on account of his wealth, and nothing of him on account of his social status. Pitt, whom Mr. George resembles in his theatricalities and his inspirations, was in many ways a very complete snob, who bowed in the presence chamber till his long nose could be seen between his legs. Probably there never was a Minister so absolutely devoid of snobbishness as Mr. George. His sense of human values is not always unimpeachable; but he does judge men as men —when he does not judge them as politicians.

Much has been said about the marvellous accuracy of his intuitions. But here again there are two sides to the question. There is a certain kind of stock-broker whose opinion one would value highly if one were disposed to what is called a 'flutter.' On questions of a quick rise or a sudden slump he is infallible; but beware of his counsel concerning a safe and profitable 'lock-up.' Mr. George's intuitions are more of the short-date than of the dependable long-distance kind. During the war his power of guessing a few weeks ahead of the fact was almost as useful as it was uncanny; but in dealing with the problems of peace, domestic and foreign, his inability to look well ahead has been quite equally marked. Even in reading a political situation he is by no means infallible, and his miscalculations in the region of finance have been calamitous, while his 'unexpected solutions' seldom solve for very long. After all, there is more in a philosophy than Mr. George has ever been able to believe.

His infinite flexibility is, however, often an advantage in negotiation. It has been well remarked that in dealing with many French statesmen of widely different temperaments he was enabled, by his gift of putting on a new soul as other men would put on a new shirt, to establish influence over almost all.* He was cynical with Clemenceau, frank with Painlevé, playfully genial with Briand, *bon enfant* with Albert Thomas, agile with Millerand, strictly correct with Poincaré. Equally various has he shown himself in domestic conference chambers—sometimes stern, oftener sweetly reasonable, occasionally unctuous, but always attuned to his audience and circumstances. There is, however, a serious subtraction from the usefulness of this gift of being so many things to so many men. Few, native or foreign, who have conferred with Mr. George have failed to imagine themselves the victims of some minor or major misapprehension. In each individual case it might be possible to suggest hallucination, but the multitude of cases negatives so simple an explanation.

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* 'The Pomp of Power,' Anonymous.

Mr. George as an orator has been subject at various times to unduly high praise and to unjust disparagement. At his worst he is very bad indeed; a really bad Lloyd George speech is almost reminiscent of the 'Carmagnoles' of Barrère, except that he never condescends to misuse the classics. But even his greatest speeches are seldom worth reading in full after the occasion has passed. There are isolated passages of great beauty, often—though more rarely of late years—touches of true poetry; his similes have sometimes bettered the best of the German Emperor's, who sometimes contrived among much bombast to introduce a figure of high dignity; indeed, it might be possible to show a real similarity between the oratorical methods, and even the mental processes, of these opposed autocrats.

But the very fitness of Mr. George's rhetoric for its purpose tends to make his speeches out-of-date with the last edition of the paper in which they are reported. They are seldom witty, if wit means the power of vitalising wisdom and making a true thing memorable. They are seldom humorous in the genial English sense. But Mr. George is unequalled in the use as a weapon of a certain verbal gaiety. He blows bubbles, so to speak, that seem to be the mere emanation of high spirits, but they give off, in bursting, a gas of deadly corrosive power. His light chaff, which appears thoroughly good-natured and almost unconsidered, is far more lethal than were the laboured and frankly murderous gibes of Disraeli. But the whole point of the thing is its spontaneity, its perfect adaptation to the circumstances, and an attempt to recall the atmosphere is generally no more successful than the German master's effort to explain all the bearings of his famous joke on the Schleswig-Holstein complication. Hence there are few good anecdotes of Mr. George's platform and Parliamentary contests. For example, how little point there appears, when stated in cold print, in a story often told by Mr. George's admirers to illustrate his quickness in retort.* In his early days of office he was obliged repeatedly to postpone an engagement to speak at Cardiff. 'Well,' he said, in beginning his speech, 'I have been a long time coming, but here I am at last.' 'So am I,' said the usual 'Voice.' 'Yes,' said Mr. George, 'but are you *all* there?' The audience was convulsed. The reader will probably, like Mr. Pickwick, merely envy the ease with which some people are entertained.

The truth is that, whether in gay mood or grave, Mr. George has but one thought, that of capturing his audience as a barrister does a jury; and much of the effect of his speeches is purely histrionic. He is a master in the fine art of leading up to 'loud cheers.' He often makes of design a slight slip, in order that he may entrap an adversary into an incautious interruption. He will deliberately provoke laughter for the purpose of quenching it with a sudden solemnity. His 'Well, really!' will often bring a blush to the face of so hardened a politician as Mr. Asquith. The shrug of his mobile shoulders, the sudden puckering of his face with a half-reproachful smile, suggest unutterable depths of depravity, or the most abject simple-mindedness, in an opponent.

Occasionally he makes, by careless over-confidence in his great powers, a mistake in the mere grammar of his trade. A slight example was his phrase, 'the tocsin of peace,' which, as Mr. Asquith said, made less agile minds envy the ease with which two ideas so far thought irreconcilable had been brought into association. More serious was what is, perhaps, his very worst figure, that of the ship in one of his numerous speeches insisting on the necessity of Coalition.* 'When there is a storm,' he said, 'it is all hands on deck. Every mariner, every old salt, is pulled out of his bunk. He puts on his sou'-wester to face the hurricane. . . . They are all wanted on deck, every one of them. I am standing on the bridge. . . . You can see typhoons on the horizon, I can see gallant vessels, like Russia and others, lying dismantled in the trough of the waves. Do not send anyone down until this ship is saved.' Macaulay found it difficult, in the case of Mr. Montgomery's similitude, to associate 'lambent beauty' with a sentry's eyes. What would he have said of the image which calls up the vision of a slightly reproachful Mr. Balfour being 'pulled out of his bunk,' or of Mr. George himself 'putting on his sou'wester?'

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*I had rejected the anecdote, like scores of others, as pointless. But it assailed me from so many quarters that I began to suspect my own judgment and to imagine that it might have some value as illustrating method and character.

Mr. George's eloquence, his adroitness, his power of emotional appeal, his quickness of intuition, his immense self-confidence, and his wonderful vitality go far to explain his progress from the 'village smithy Parliament' to the domination of British politics. But no one of these qualities, nor all combined, adequately explains why it was he, and no other, who could lead the country in the crisis of the war. The truth would seem to be that a great extremity called into activity the ultimate Lloyd George which underlies the skilful politician, the idealist, the shrewd negotiator, and the amateur of sermons and golf.

And this ultimate Lloyd George had just that touch of ruthlessness which made him a fit match for a wholly ruthless enemy. He was a fighter who had no object but to win, who would refuse no weapon, decline no risk, scorn no help, respect no tradition, value no friendship, in his determination to win. Others were intellectually as well endowed. But who else had not a handicap of some sort—property, prepossession, veneration for institutions, 'the public school spirit,' a hundred small filaments binding him as the tiny threads

* Llandudno, October, 1920.

of the Lilliputians did Gulliver? Mr. George, without spiritual impediment, could devote himself ruthlessly to the removal of exterior obstacles. All others cared, though they might not admit it, for something besides victory,—for their clubs, their dinners, their friends, the British Constitution, the three tailors of Tooley Street, the opinion of their regiment, their social clique, their political tea-party, or what not. Mr. Asquith would not—rather could not—even for the sake of winning the war, coin a phrase like 'the tocsin of peace.' Lord Haldane could not, if it meant smashing the German centre, emancipate himself from the idolatry of German thought. Mr. George had nothing to bind him. He may have had German friends before the war; he had only German enemies during the war. He certainly had many party friends before the war; during the war he knew only helpers and hinderers; the one he welcomed without prejudice; the other he destroyed, if he could, without ruth. The rough business may have cost a momentary pang, but that hardly counted with a man whose obscure struggles must have brought him face to face with things much worse than the severance of a pleasant old political comradeship or the manufacture of an unpalatable new one.

Mr. George has the good nature of some of those old Romans who, as retired conquerors, were willing to show mercy, and even philanthropy. But he belongs—perhaps through that Romanised Celtic blood of his, perhaps only through his early contact with brutal realities—rather to that ancient world, with its concentration on ends and its comparative indifference to means, than to the gentlemanly compromise of the English scheme. At the core of the man who has said, quite sincerely, so many moving things, there is an adamantine hardness. Off the coast of Finland you will find a multitude of little islands which in summer flame with colour. There you see, relieving the ruggedness of the pines, an intoxicating gaiety of bloom and berry; but while you are marvelling at the resources of the soil your host shows you that half a foot below the surface there is nothing but solid rock. The whole island is one great boulder; and all that pageant of vegetation is a mere film on the face of the stone, from which the spade, if used too vigorously, strikes fire. In like manner the surface softnesses, sentimentalities and luxuriances of Mr. George rest on a foundation quite obdurate. Unlike the Prussian's, the hardness the war for a moment revealed was an intelligent hardness; it could feel the limits of the practicable. It was policy and not tenderness that moved Mr. George to oppose the Robertsonian policy of men and more men to feed the French furnace. It was not timidity but calculation which made him always liable to be influenced by a by-election, or by a menacing speech from a clever man, or by a specially vehement demand for beer. But he had no delicacy concerning himself or others; to return to his simile of the ship, we may express the fact by saying that every other 'old salt' who was 'pulled out of his bunk' would at least delay his appearance on deck until he had put on his pea-jacket, as well as the famous sou'wester. Mr. George, on due necessity, would have saved the ship in his trousers, perhaps even without them. Equally, no tenderness made him falter in his course, whether it were an old colleague, or an Admiral, or the British Constitution that stood in his way. If these could not be removed without endangering things deemed important, they must, of course, remain; otherwise they must go, and the manner of their going was a question of pure expediency. In short, Mr. George literally cared for nothing but victory, and for his own position, which he thought the essential condition of victory. The same could be said of no other. Mr. Asquith could not fight old friends and old ways; Lord Lansdowne might sometimes think of the income-tax, Lord Curzon of his present dignity and perhaps of a future Marquisate, Mr. Churchill of a newspaper article, Mr. Law of Sir Edward Carson, Sir Edward Carson of Belfast, and Sir Frederick Smith of a joke. All other politicians, with their traditions, interests and affiliations, were to some extent divided in their aims and energies, and supreme power came naturally in due course to the lonely man of all weapons, few restraints, and one idea.

It was, chiefly, the recognition of this fact—that

Mr. George was 'out' to win, and had no bowels for incompetence or half-heartedness—that won him the popular support which never failed so long as the fortunes of war were in the balance. He was felt to be not only the thorough-going enemy of Germany, but the enemy of all that might, whether by slackness or chivalry, help Germany. The part played by the newspapers in creating a Lloyd George legend has been much exaggerated. It is true that Mr. George has always had a full appreciation of the value of a good Press. It is true that he has taken steps at various times to assure himself of that advantage. But in the main his hold on the newspapers has been gained by his public achievements, and by the perfectly legitimate exercise of courtesy and common sense. From the moment that he first assumed office, he took care that journalists should be treated as men carrying out functions of public usefulness, that they should be told what they could properly be told, and politely refused what it was not wise to tell them. One day, very early in his Ministerial career, he noticed a number of men waiting in the rain outside the Board of Trade office, and was informed that they were representatives of the Press, anxious to hear the result of an important conference between strikers and employers. Pressing inquiry a little further, he found that this disconsolate crowd included several writers of almost European reputation. He at once invited the journalists into a comfortable room, apologised for the bad manners inadvertently shown them, and took decisive steps to secure that in future there should be no such discourtesy. Naturally he, like Mr. Chamberlain, whom he in this matter imitated, reaped a full reward. Some newspapers continued to dislike his politics, but his manners were always appreciated.

Later, when a change of conditions compelled newspapers to go to press much earlier than formerly, Mr. George alone among politicians realised the absurdity of making an important speech at the time usual in Victorian days. He spoke thenceforth as much as possible early in the day, and for preference at noon on a Saturday, thus ensuring the very maximum of publicity. Hence the bitter complaints that a 'doped'

Press reported a Lloyd George speech fully, while boycotting the utterances of his old-fashioned opponents.

Such realism in matters most statesmen have considered beneath their notice is in strict harmony with the view Mr. George adopted in his very early days, that his audience is not the House of Commons, but the country. Though master of every Parliamentary art, he has never been in the true sense a Parliament man; and years of absolutism, modified by the trade union vote, have led him to resent any effort on the part of the House of Commons to reassert its authority. Indeed, it is probable that while the general historian will be fascinated by the hero who 'won the war' (but did not quite win the peace), the constitutional specialist will be chiefly interested in the innovating statesman who overthrew the growth of over two centuries, or who was ultimately overthrown by it. For that would appear to be the question which the not distant future must decide. There seems to be no room in one small island for the British Constitution and David Lloyd George.

Some years ago the author, meeting a well-informed American publicist, asked for his real opinion of the late Theodore Roosevelt. To the Englishman Roosevelt seemed a truly great man; was that the view of his informed compatriot? The American took a full half-minute—an unusual time for any American—to arrange his thoughts. Then he said, with slow impressiveness, 'Yes, Teddy is a big man, a real big man. There's no doubt about that. But—he's the littlest big man I know.'

In recalling this quaint criticism, the author, of course, in no way associates himself with it. But it may, perhaps, be invoked to suggest the nature of the difficulties which beset any attempt at a final estimate of David Lloyd George. He is like that genie in the Arabian tale who was now a fire-vomiting giant, now a crowing cock, and anon an almost invisible pomegranate seed. Those who see only one set of facts find in him, to borrow the Gibbonian phrase, 'the awful majesty of a hero,' whereas Mr. George is, in fact, a quite domestic and comfortable person. Those who see only another set of facts are guilty of even greater absurdity in treating him merely as an adroit politician. The present writer is content to state facts as he has seen them, and to draw only such inferences as seem to be justified. For the rest, he merely suggests that history will agree, with much contemporary opinion, that Mr. George may fairly claim admission to the small company of great, and even very great, British statesmen. But it will probably also place him among those of whom it may be said, as Macaulay said of the elder Pitt, that their greatness was 'not a complete and well-proportioned greatness,' and that the drama of their lives, far from presenting the symmetry of a perfect piece of art, is 'a crude though striking piece, a piece abounding in incongruities, a piece without any unity of plan, but redeemed by some noble passages, the effect of which is increased by the tameness or extravagance of what precedes or of what follows.' We may at least say that in Mr. George's case a part is greater than the whole, and that, if it were possible, the subtraction of much would make the sum greater. But that, indeed, is merely to state that he is human, or perhaps a little more human than some others.

If, however, we withhold judgment on every point where a difference of opinion is possible, if we abandon to destructive criticism many acts of administrative vigour which are claimed by his admirers as triumphs, if we accept the least charitable view of his faults and failures, there still remains more than enough with which to defy what Lord Rosebery once called 'the body-snatchers of history, who dig up dead reputations for malignant dissection.' If only that he imparted, in a black time, when it appeared but too likely that the Alliance might falter and succumb from mere sick-headache, his own defying, ardent, and invincible spirit to a tired, puzzled, distracted and distrustful nation, if only that he dispelled the vapours, inspired a new hope and resolution, brought the British people to that temper which makes small men great, assured Allies that their cause was in the fullest sense our own, and finally achieved the great moral victory implied in 'unity of command'—if these things be alone considered, he will be judged to have earned for his portrait the right to a dignified place in the gallery of history, and some future generation will probably recall with astonishment that it was considered unfit to adorn the dining-room of a London club.

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